

12<sup>th</sup> May 2021

## Actions

**“Our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds.”**

*George Elliot, Adam Bede*

Towards the end of “The Sermon on the Mount”, gathered for us in Matthew’s Gospel, the writer has Jesus warning against “false prophets”.

*Ye shall know them by their fruits.  
Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*

It’s not enough for someone to *say* what their motives are, or how they feel, or what they think. Their actions will reveal the truth of who they are.

George Elliot had it right. We know that our inner being determines how we act. But it is equally true that how we act can reveal what we really live by. The full quote from *Adam Bede* takes this further.

*Our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds; and until we know what has been or will be the peculiar combination of outward with inward facts, which constitute a man’s critical actions, it will be better not to think ourselves wise about his character.*

It’s only in understanding this balance between the “outward” and “inward”, and seeing it in action in a person’s life, that we can truly believe that a person is what they say they are.

In anticipation of the death of King Charles II, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, offered “The King’s Epitaph”:

*Here lies a great and mighty king,  
Whose promise none relies on;  
He never said a foolish thing,  
Nor every did a wise one.*

and the king is reputed to have responded:

*This is very true; for my words are my own, and my actions are my ministers.*

Oh no! We cannot, and should not, create such a dichotomy between words and actions. The words will be mine, and the actions will be mine too. The inward and outward have each to show the truth of the other.

### **A prayer for today**

*Lord, change me from a thornbush to a vine, from a thistle to a fruit-tree, so I might offer the grapes and figs of love and not the thorns and thistles of harm. Amen*