

Re:Easter Blog – 1st March

Repentance

Is your first reaction to the theme of 'repentance' that it is a bit of a marketing own-goal to start any series with that? Hardly uplifting is it? However, many in the worldwide church will mark 1st March as 'Ash Wednesday', which is officially the start of Lent, the six weeks leading up to Easter. The 'ash' is a symbol of penitence for our sins.

In our church tradition we can sometimes make the mistake of seeing 'repentance' only in terms of when we first became Christians, when we first encountered the salvation God offers to us through the Lord Jesus – "Repent and be saved!" It certainly was important when we first believed that we turned from our sin AND we turned to God. To repent is to turn and to become a true Christian requires this moral, mental and spiritual turning.

But repentance (and penitence) are life-long experiences for the Christian as we need to keep coming back to our Lord when we have fallen and sinned and lost our way again. And this period of Lent might be a good time to ask ourselves just how seriously we (and God) take our sins.

In Luke 18 Jesus shares a story about two people with very contrasting attitudes to themselves.

Luke 18:10-14

¹⁰ 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: "God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." ¹³ 'But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." ¹⁴ 'I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'

(For more on this passage you might enjoy reading

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=815)

There are loads of lessons we might draw from the story that Jesus shared below (humility is best; don't compare yourself with others etc). Let's be clear that Jesus doesn't even say that the Pharisee was a liar – perhaps he actually was, in the matters of the Jewish Law, righteous. But after his prayer time it was the tax collector, and not the Pharisee, who was justified in God's sight. It is only when we agree with God about our sinfulness that he justifies us freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Let us be 100% honest in front of God about who and what we are – and that way we can 'go home justified', having received God's blessing!

At the start of our blog journey, it is good to confront again the truth that our sin is so dreadful to God and he takes it so seriously, that the horror of the cross was the only remedy. And that repenting of our sin is something for daily living so that, whenever we have failed and fallen, we don't just stay down, but we turn back again to our loving and forgiving Lord for his cleansing and restoration.

Prayer

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” (the Jesus prayer – you might like to pray this over quite a few times)

Action

People often give up something for Lent and, if you have, good for you and may you keep it up. A break from chocolate, beer, East-enders, impulse shopping, TV, computer games, football or facebook will be good for you.

But perhaps a greater challenge for many of us to consider this Lent might be whether we need to **mentally and morally turn from a specific secret sinful attitude or outlook that we hold onto.**

(Bitterness, resentment, lust, greed, jealousy, anger to suggest a few). Name it as ‘sin’ and actively, with the help of the Holy Spirit, decide to put it to death and give it up! After all, as Jesus said, ‘It is what comes out of us that defiles us, not what goes in!’