

Ash Wednesday Reflection 5th March 2025

Lord, I pray that our hearts will be open to you as we reflect on your word. May we humbly hear what you have to say to us that our lives may be changed for your glory. In the name of Christ. Amen.

Ash Wednesday is a day to remember our humanness and mortality. It is a day to begin the season of Lent, a time for reflection, penitence, and preparation for Easter.

Many Christians don't like the idea of reflecting on the fact that we are sinners who need to repent...because they say we have been forgiven our sin through Jesus Christ and that is quite true.

But, we are still sinners... (although we are beloved sinners) ...and as our readings have pointed out today/night God loves a humble heart. We remain humble when we remember who we are before God and depend totally on his goodness to us.

Psalm 51 is a Penitential Psalm and is a good model for us to use in repentance. It is a psalm of David that he wrote after Nathan the prophet went to him in relation to his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite.

David was feeling crushed with guilt. Hopefully none of us have ever been in David's situation but probably there have been things that we have done that we have felt pretty bad about. Sin is sin. We might just have secret thoughts not even acted on, or there may be things we haven't done, where we haven't honoured God, where we haven't loved our neighbour, where we have been self-seeking rather than other seeking.

Do we really ponder our sins when we say the confession every week or do we just brush over them? We say these words; 'we have sinned against you in thought, word and deed, and in what we have failed to do. We have not loved you with our whole heart, we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; we repent, and are sorry....' Do we mean them? Or are we like the hypocritical Pharisees and are a bit smug sometimes pointing out other people's sins but failing to see our own. *Look at me God, I go to Church every week, I say the right words, I give money to the church.*

Lent is a time to focus and draw near to God...to truly say we are sorry, and to turn to God like David did.

David asks for God's mercy...according to God's steadfast love. He knows God is merciful and loving. In fact, he appeals to God's abundant mercy...God is full of mercy and he chooses to show us his mercy.

David then acknowledges his sins...his transgressions. David's here were pretty obvious and large. I think we often don't quite acknowledge or recognize our sins.... But are our

hearts always in the right place seeking to love and serve God and others above all else? I know mine is not.

David prays for cleansing. 'Wash me thoroughly', 'purge me with hyssop' 'make me whiter than snow'. We know that God has made this possible through the blood of Jesus. But it is still fitting that we should ask for this. From 1 John 1 we read; "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

David then pleads for renewal. He is passionately committed to being changed by God.

Verses 10 – 12 are a favourite of mine and probably well known by many and have been turned into meditative songs. 'Create in me a clean heart, o God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of your salvation and sustain in me a willing spirit.'

David wants a right spirit...one that is unwaveringly faithful to God and to his word. He prays for the joy of God's salvation. Ah what joy we can experience when we know God's salvation. What relief from the burden of sin. What grief and burden David must have been carrying around. He asks for a willing spirit...one that will follow God's ways not his. He wants a spirit that will enable him to be generous and loving to others not seeking to hurt and harm as he had done.

Is that what we ask of God -a willing spirit to serve him – in Isaiah 58 we read that the 'fast' God requires from us is one that seeks justice, feeds the poor, houses the homeless and clothes the naked'. Some people choose to 'fast' from some things like chocolate or alcohol or Facebook over lent. I see how much time some people spend on social media so disconnecting could be a good discipline but in place of those things what do we give to God instead? Do we read the bible more, pray more, listen to God, listen to others, feed the hungry. As we disconnect from some things we should connect more deeply in other areas – seek to love God and others more deeply.

Next in the psalm, look at verse 13; having received God's mercy and forgiveness, and given a right spirit to serve God, David says he will teach 'transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.' He says he will sing aloud his deliverance and declare the praises of God. Having known God's mercy ourselves, we are to be a witness of this to others and sing God's praises.

David then returns to what I think is a good theme for lent...humility. Having contrite hearts. Verse 17; 'The sacrifice that is acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken spirit and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.'

Our reading from Joel encourages us to ‘rend our hearts, not our garments’.

God values a genuinely repentant heart over mere ritualistic sacrifices, emphasizing that true worship comes from a humble and broken spirit acknowledging one's sin and seeking forgiveness, which God will never reject; it highlights the importance of inner transformation over outward religious acts.

Jesus is our great example, in Matthew 11: 29 Jesus said to his disciples, *learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.* Jesus had no sin, and yet he lived with a broken spirit and contrite heart...he fully submitted himself to the will of the Father. *When our hearts are broken, we are completely open to the Spirit of God and recognize our dependence on Him for all that we have and all that we are.* (Bruce Porter)

So, as we journey through lent to Good Friday and the joy of the resurrection at Easter; let us be mindful of our mortality and sinfulness as the ashes remind us tonight. Let us take time to truly repent and turn to God and ask him to create in us clean hearts to serve him in all we do. It doesn't mean we can't still be joyful in lent...for we know God's mercy and love and real joy comes from his salvation. But let us make sure our hearts are in the right place, meek and humble, seeking to be transformed by the love of Christ.