

Conscience and Repentance (Exodus 24:12-18)

10:00am Holy Communion – 16th February 2026

Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!’ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Get up and do not be afraid.’ And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, ‘Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.’

<Prayer>

As we come now to the end of those weeks which lead to the **season of Lent**, so you may recall those moments in early January when I stood here to remind you that the new **season Epiphany** is a time to hear again and again how God has chosen to reveal himself in many ways.

So, I would like to complete these weeks of our approach towards Lent by locating one final place where God makes his presence known, and perhaps is the most special place of all – **where God can be found within our souls.**

Thinking of ourselves in this triple way is actually quite helpful. Many of the old saints and mystics speak of it like that. Scripture is replete with descriptions of faith and prayer as the activities of the soul, deep within. But we can pray with our bodies too, at least in a certain way through our posture – kneeling – or if you are like me then you may find you can pray quite well when out on exercise – I find walking in the hills a very prayerful time, but being still does not work for everyone.

Prayer is also cerebral – something of the mind, the brain. We have all experienced those reviews of life we give ourselves when we are alone, as we pray through subjects and situations. They can be like a newsreel of everything which is going on for us right now. Maybe you create unheard prayers as you think, with words that you could write down and say if you wished. In our minds we imagine pictures of how we would like things to be and then bring them to God.

But there is that spiritual place within us, sometimes described as our *inner* lives. **This is where God is said to dwell.**

It is not always easy to locate or explain that, so some of the spiritual writers describe God's place within, in more familiar ways.

One of the best-known spiritual writers of the 20th Century – Thomas Merton – wrote of a **mountain** within himself (recall from our first lessons, the Old Testament stories of how God called Moses to the mountain to hear Him speak). Another – St Theresa of Avila – wrote of God indwelling within some *interior castle* – like the place God is said to live in glory. Perhaps this is what we mean when we talk of the soul.

Before going any further, let me make a distinction. When we pray, we take the lead to do so – we give time and place to the activity of prayer, be that in worship, when rising in the morning or turning-in at the end of the day – when ironing or gardening or walking the dog – however that is for you - we make our prayers and we bring them to God. We fill that moment with what we decide. **But what if God wishes to speak to us, in his time and according to his purpose?** If God is present in our lives, we should not be surprised that he does, after all we have a relationship with him. That deep feeling that God is present in our lives - in our castle, in our soul – **is where God calls to us from, where He takes the lead in drawing us close.**

This sense of God indwelling, speaking to us from within, is common to the human experience. **The best understood word I can use at this point is that of our conscience** – that experience of being spoken to from within. **We Christians wish to have our conscience as the place where God resides within us and speaks to us from.**

We should want his voice to be the one to speak to us **first**, before every other worldly influence which would like to occupy our lives. We all have those experiences of life - pain, guilt, joy and peace, just to name a few.

Passions such as these are where we find ourselves calling for God's presence, wanting to know he is there. Do you ever find that the activities of the day can make you feel quite satisfied – perhaps working in the garden or around the house – they are good distractions, but then we become aware that there is a second place of feeling which at the same time might harbour our worries and concerns. **Such feelings remain perpetual, disturbing our soul, these are often the most difficult things, things we cannot easily resolve.** Such deep fears are where we would want God to be – in the same place - **so we should seek the perpetual God to occupy our souls.**

The spring weather is surely coming, when the skies may eventually clear and we can begin to receive some sunshine. That's nice, but then you may begin to see your homes and gardens as needing the good old spring clean. Something inside you will see the need and hopefully bring some motivation to get cracking.

Let's just return to that idea of our soul, our inner life, in spatial terms - like there being an inner room within us for God, where He is to be found. You live outward lives of space and structure where your homes have particular places for things. As we have said, the Christian person has a place for God in their lives – for the indwelling of His Holy Spirit, or even that nice old accompaniment of having a guardian angel.

Is that a place where we can shine a Spring light into, to also keep tidy and in good order? Yes, we can attend to our inner lives, perhaps to having a clean and tidy. **I suggest to you that the season of Lent is for that.**

Now is the moment for me to bring in the point I wish to make today, which is to understand **what we mean by the call to repentance**. Commonly we think of that in relation to casting off sin, but I would like us to go a little further and deeper than that. Returning to that shape of mind, body and spirit, we can ask how repentance applies to our lives. You might in your mind consider those sinful things you have done, and then confess them – which sounds like cleaning, wiping over the surface of our actions and behaviour. We do that in church all the time. Or repenting with our **bodies** could be like our actions towards others, giving time and effort to get our priorities right. Sin sometimes speaks of gluttony and greed, being possessive and vain. We can realise that we do not honour God and serve others if we are lazy or vain, or many of the other slothful things we people seem to easily do. **We certainly do have to repent from the weak bodies of our flesh.**

But what is repentance of the soul? I've used that word conscience already, to describe the place in our inmost being where God **should be for us**. A person whose conscience is totally aligned to the purposes of God, and whose soul is the perpetual dwelling place of God, might be the exemplar we should seek to be. Perhaps the only human person to be that so fully was Jesus Christ himself. **Maybe then the deepest repentance for us is to realise our distance from the person of Christ, in this life we live.**

But we can refuse our conscience and therefore deny that inner voice of God which calls us to repentance. So much of this life in the western world expects us to live for ourselves, encouraging us to place ourselves at the centre, and to see everything in relation to 'me'. We are told to carry within us such nonsense about being rightful individuals of indisputable sovereign choice.

Believing that, which we so easily do, is what we need to repent of – **clearing from our souls the lies of the world and keeping only God's just and gentle rule in that deepest place.**

Knowing our human state of vast imperfection and not making excuse for that is what God calls us to bring to him, when we repent. To repent from our soul is to bring to God the most difficult things of ourselves, our natural weakness in the face of so many temptations and worldly distractions. That is the repentance you should seek for this coming season of Lent.

Amen