

## **Ash Wednesday - Luke 5:17-32**

One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting nearby (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. Just then some men came, carrying a paralysed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you.'

Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, 'Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, 'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven you", or to say, "Stand up and walk"? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the one who was paralysed—'I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.' Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen strange things today.'

After this he went out and saw a tax-collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up, left everything, and followed him.

Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax-collectors and others sitting at the table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax-collectors and sinners?' Jesus answered, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.'

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.*

I read last week that Lent does not promise reinvention, offer spiritual upgrade, and it does not even assume that we feel particularly motivated. It simply arrives each year and asks us to begin again, that is mercy.

The 40 days of Lent give us that opportunity to start again to get rhythm back into our prayer life and to focus. This Ash Wednesday service reminds us very clearly of our mortality and as the words of the [Collect for Ash Wednesday](#) also remind us that God hates nothing that he has made and forgives the sins of the penitent to make in us new and contrite hearts.

Chris talked about repentance on Sunday and I want to continue to think about repentance this evening. Repentance is not merely a word heard in church; it is a transformative experience, a turning point in our relationship with God.

In our first reading from [Ezekiel 18:21-24, 30-31](#), God speaks with clarity and compassion. He declares that no matter how far a person has strayed, turning away from sin, repentance leads to life. God does not delight in judgement; instead, He yearns for each of us to return to Him, to seek forgiveness and renewal. The promise is clear: repentance wipes the slate clean, giving us a new heart and a new spirit. It is not about punishment, but about restoration and hope.

In the reading from [Luke 5:17-32](#), we hear of Jesus's healing and teaching, and welcoming those whom society had cast aside. His words, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," are a powerful invitation. The tax collectors of the day were more than little corrupt. Jesus shows us that repentance is for

everyone, not just a select few. He seeks out the lost and offers them a path back to God, demonstrating that repentance and forgiveness are at the very heart of Jesus's ministry.

When we look at Ezekiel and Luke together, we see a consistent message running through Scripture: repentance is not a one-time act, but a lifelong invitation. God's Word assures us that repentance leads to life, healing, and a relationship with Him. Whether spoken by the prophets or demonstrated by Christ, the call to turn away from sin and towards God is a cornerstone of our faith.

Why does repentance matter to us now?

Because it brings freedom from the weight of past mistakes. Repentance is more than saying sorry; it is an active turning, a deliberate choice to change direction and follow Christ. It is about how we act towards others.

As Chris said it is about refreshing the soul, that dwelling place for God in our bodies.

As I said at the beginning Lent just turns up, finds us ready or not, and offers a fresh start to anyone who asks. The steps are simple: acknowledge your shortcomings, turn away from them, and seek God's guidance for a new way forward.

This year we are offering a Lent course, every Tuesday at 7pm here, starting on 24<sup>th</sup> for 5 weeks. Whilst it would be great if you can attend all the weekly sessions, each week is a standalone element, so don't worry if you are not able to make every week.

The course looks at 4 different areas of our lives and our relationship with God and each week we shall explore the topic in silence, reflection and prayer.

The first week focuses on Salvation – The Renewal of our lives.

As I said earlier Ezekiel and Luke tell us of that consistent message that repentance is not a onetime act. The Bible, is full of examples of where we are told that salvation is promised to us if we are in Christ and prepared to be transformed by the Spirit.

Reflecting on renewal, which is a gift of God’s mercy, will strengthen our relationship with God.

In closing, I would ask that we all reflect on where we need to turn back to God, to say sorry and act differently.

Repentance is an invitation from God, not a demand—a chance for us all to receive a new and contrite heart to refresh the Soul.

Amen

*Robert Fox*