

Traditional Home service

Sunday 12th Dec

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, who at your first coming sent your messenger to prepare your way before you: grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready your way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in your sight; for you are alive and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Let us turn away from sin and turn to the Lord, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

My God, for love of you I desire to hate and forsake all sins by which I have ever displeased you; and I resolve by the help of your grace to commit them no more; and to avoid all opportunities of sin. Help me to do this, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts. Open our lips, Lord: and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (Tell Out, My Soul, the Greatness of the Lord!)

READINGS - Zephaniah 3.14-20
Philippians 4.4-7
Luke 3.7-18

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 2 (Rejoice, the Lord Is King)

CONCLUSION

May God the Son give you grace to live in the light of his coming as redeemer and judge. And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

HYMNS TO USE

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
Tender to me the promise of his word;
In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his Name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
His mercy sure, from age to age to same;
His holy Name--the Lord, the Mighty One

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight
The hungry fed, the humble lifted high

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
To children's children and for evermore!

Rejoice, the Lord is King:
Your Lord and King adore!
Rejoice, give thanks and sing,
And triumph evermore.
Lift up your heart,
Lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Jesus, the Saviour, reigns,
The God of truth and love;
When He has purged our stains,
He took his seat above;
Lift up your heart,
Lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

His kingdom cannot fail,
He rules o'er earth and heav'n;
The keys of death and hell
Are to our Jesus giv'n:
Lift up your heart,
Lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Rejoice in glorious hope!
Our Lord and judge shall come
And take His servants up
To their eternal home:
Lift up your heart,
Lift up your voice!
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Sermon - Adrian Morton
Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18
Repentance from Sin

I want to talk about Repentance this morning...
Its a good Advent subject!

In our reading, John is telling the crowd to
produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

In other words, our lives should display right
living in line with repentance.

And John is very practical about what that
looks like.

Share with others.
Act with integrity.
To the soldier, if you are in a position of
influence, don't use that position take
advantage of people.

But John the Baptists' message, was "a
baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of
sins."

And I want to talk about that again this
morning.

Jesus' primary message was "Repent, for the
Kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Repentance is key for successful Christian
living.
All spiritual advance begins with repentance.

John Milton said, "*Repentance is the golden
key that opens the palace of eternity.*"

Before looking at Repentance I want to say a
few things about sin.

Because how we understand 'Sin' will help us
understand how important Repentance is..

Often the church has tended to reduce sin to
'moral failure'.

We've tended to locate sin in particular **acts**,
and acts that break a known law.

So Church communities down the ages have
been terrified that their sons and daughters
don't sleep around, or don't get drunk or don't
do this or don't do that whatever...

<Remember Kevin Peat telling us he grew up
in a church that warned people not to go to the
cinema, or to dances I think...>

Now I believe that thinking about sin is
inadequate.

And it has led to lots of rules... lots of
preaching against things...

There are a number of problems of viewing sin
as just a human condition, or just about certain
acts:

1. we trivialise sin.. and understand the cross
as no more than God dealing with certain
sinful actions and broken laws.
2. we easily start to compare our own moral
failure with other people's - and we always
look good from that comparison!

(Well, at least I don't commit murder...leads to
the culture.. As long as I'm a good person...)

3. we view the need for repentance as only
being necessary for dealing with our moral
failure...
4. and we understand that repentance is
simply saying sorry, or expressing regret...
for certain acts, for being 'naughty'

Now of course scripture does mention sin in
that kind of way.
As being moral failure...

So you can look at Galatians 5:19 and there is
a long list of moral failure to avoid..

sexual immorality, hatred, jealousy, selfish
ambition etc etc

But the essence of sin is much more than
simply human moral failure.

Sin has deeper and more far reaching
implications.

And equally therefore, Repentance is far more
profound, powerful and necessary for
successful Christian living.

I believe it is critical that 'Sin' is understood in
relation to God.

So Sin is not simply a human condition.

But Sin is always a condition in relation to God.

The core idea of Sin is that of a rupture of relationship has occurred.

If we understand Sin in that way, the person who says to me, and to you, I don't need God because I'm a good person anyway.

(A common view!)

That person is committing the biggest sin! Why, because they are saying they want to live life independently from a relationship with God.

Think about the early chapters of Genesis.

The big narrative of Christianity is that God wants relationship with his people.

That's what the fall cost us.
That's what Christ died to restore.

From this early chapter of Genesis we learn that the root of all sin comes from the desire to live independently from God.

In John the Baptists' time, the people were living in slavery again.
This time in their own land.

And John's message was that salvation and rescue was coming.

But the OT prophets had preached for a long time that their slavery was a result of their sin, which was worshipping other idols rather than the true God.

The people had walked away from the God who had promised to be their deliverer, their provider etc...

<Alaister McFadyen, a prominent theologian describes sin as 'a refusal to praise God.'>

The point is that sin, at its core, has to be understood as a rupture in our relationship with God.

Also, it's worth saying that Sin is not part of the essence of being human.

People talk as if it is...

"Well, I couldn't help it, I'm only human..."

Sin is a distortion of humanity.

It is not the most fundamental truth about humanity.

The most fundamental truth about humanity is that we were created in the image and likeness of God, to be like Christ.

OK, Hold in your minds that Sin at its core, has to be understood as a rupture in our relationship with God.

It is whatever is stopping you having a full relationship with the Lord.

It is whatever is preventing you from living Kingdom life to the full.

Ok, on to Repentance...

At its root, the word means to change your thinking.

Go back and change how you think....

Which will be evidenced by a change in behaviour.

But the root is 'Change the way you think'
Or in other words: go back to God's perspective on reality.

John's message was a message of preparation.

"Prepare the way for the Lord..."

In order to receive fully the one who is coming, you need to change your thinking...

John was saying "make it easy to receive the One who is coming."

Who of course was Christ - the fullness of the presence of God.

Repentance, changing the way we think, going back to God's perspective on reality, makes it easier to receive the fullness of the presence of God.

Makes it easier to receive the Kingdom...

I would suggest, none of us has a full and perfect relationship with the Lord!

All of us have ruptures in our relationship with Him.

Philippians 4:19 says: *“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

How many of our needs will the Lord meet? - ALL!

I believe the Lord will allow pressures and challenges in our life to reveal those ruptures.

Now, of course, not all pressure and challenges come from the Lord, though he can use all things for good, as we know.

But He will bring pressures and challenges in life in order to reveal these ruptures in our relationship with him.

Or to show us where we are trying to meet a need without the Lord involved.

And He never does this to shame us or punish us.

He allows pressures to come in our life, in order to reveal ruptures, so we can start to see things how He sees things.

So we can go back to God’s perspective on reality.

Always remember that repentance is a product of God’s kindness towards you.

Romans 2:4 says:

“that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?”

Again, the Lord allows pressures and challenges to come, because they reveal stuff that is wrong with our hearts.

They reveal ruptures in our relationship with Him.

Again, its never to shame us or punish us. They are opportunities for us to see things as he sees them and go through process of repentance.

Look at the example of the disciples.. They were immersed in an environment of presence and power...

During the process, heart issues they didn’t even know they had were revealed.

Peter, would never have thought he would deny the Lord. It was ‘Everyone else but him.’

But the pressure of the situation revealed a heart issue in his life. That needed to be dealt with to fulfil his calling in life. Which was to be a great church leader.

So pressures and challenges are God given opportunities, out of His kindness towards us, to engage in repentance and to start to see things from His perspective.

Some examples which hopefully will show what I’m trying to talk about:

EXAMPLE 1

In our first reading from Phillipians 4:7, it says:

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Living with Peace, we would all agree is a kingdom characteristic. And its a product of relationship with Him - its “in Christ Jesus”...

So we all know that living with Peace is what the Lord would have us do..

For myself, though, when I first started being a vicar, often I would notice that after I received a troubling phone call or I would speak to someone about a problem they had, my levels of anxiety would rise.

Occasionally, it would keep me awake at night, worrying about a problem that I needed to find a solution for.

And its because I grew up with a tendency to want to fix things, or to find a solution to problems...

Nowadays, whilst not completely free, I am a lot better at keeping my peace when surrounded by other people’s problems.

Why, because I've gone through a process of repentance.

Of changing my thinking...

It was something like:

Lord, I am sorry for believing I am more important than I am.

Lord, I am sorry for trying to do your job, when its not mine to do.

Because you Lord are Jehovah Jireh, Provider...

And Lord, I am changing my thinking, about whose job it really is to provide, to be the solution bringer.. etc..

So I'm seeing things as He sees them. I'm living with God's perspective on reality.

If we are someone who easily gets crippled by fear.

And I'm not talking about low level anxiety that most of us encounter through life.

But if fear is debilitating for us.

We embrace fear in such a way that it stops us from functioning well.

Then ultimately we are doubting God.

We are doubting that God is perfectly faithful and trustworthy.

What's the solution- Repentance!

Change how we think...

Its a battle for our minds...

Another example - EXAMPLE 2

How do we react when something goes wrong!

I have a tendency to blame others when something goes wrong!

Maybe you have a a tendency to blame yourself?

Or it may be you criticise your self when things go wrong.

Or you want to withdraw from people.

What's going on?

Well, a heart issue is being revealed?

So, if like me, you blame others, you may need to go through the process of repentance.

"Lord, you've called me to carry responsibility for that.

Forgive me for not carrying that responsibility well.

I believe you've equipped me, I believe You will never ask me to do something you don't also equip me for etc etc

Or if you are someone who always blame yourself, or beat yourselves up, then we go through the process:

"Lord I see that I have this tendency to beat myself up when problems come.

Lord, forgive my pride...

That's what it is.. we turn all the intention on ourselves..

Name it for what it is!

Lord, forgive my pride...

I am believing things about myself that you don't believe about me."

Again Philippians 4:19, *"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."*

Whenever we try to fulfil our need for significance, or security, or self-worth, or comfort by other means apart from God, then a rupture in our relationship with the Lord is being revealed.

Those who have wrestled with, lets say, addiction.

Be it alcohol, drugs or pornography, it doesn't matter in some sense...

The church has tended to see the addiction as the primary sin.

And of course those things are destructive to our humanity.

But the addiction is really just a symptom of something deeper that has gone wrong in our souls.

Some take drugs to escape their reality.

Its the reality that needs changing.

Its to see reality from God's perspective...

And I know addiction can change the chemicals in our body.

And so as well as the need to change our

thinking we need to help with the physical affects of addiction.

All I'm trying to get at is that sin at its root is about a rupture in our relationship with the Lord.

The One who is able to meet all our needs...

If Sin is deep within my soul, then my repentance process needs to go equally deep....

Two last thoughts...

On the alpha course Louise talks about the process of inviting the Lord into our lives.

The illustration she uses likens our lives to a house.

So its like you invite him initially into your hallway.

As you continue to walk with him, he wants to be in all the rooms of your house.

Your attic, your dark cellar etc..

All areas of your life....

And actually if we allow him, he will lead us, via pressures and challenges, to your attic, your dark cellar etc..

Repentance, changing your thinking gives him access...

The final thought is this...

I've said that repentance is about starting to see things as God's sees them. Its about believing truth.

So its a battle in our minds...

I'm always amazed that the Pharisees, the most religious and those with the most knowledge of the Law... missed the fullness of God's presence.

KV - on the prophecy course talked about deception.

Gal 6 says "Do not be deceived..."

The problem with deception is that you don't know you are being deceived.

That's the point.

So if someone tells you the truth and you are being deceived it won't feel true.

and what KV said was this.

We have to allow people to speak into our life who we trust, and this is the key, who we trust more than we trust ourselves.

Because if we are deceived, the truth won't feel true.

And we need people we trust to tell us, 'What you are believing is a lie'.

It could be what we believe about God.

Do we believe he can meet all our needs.

Do we believe he is the Provider.

Do we believe he is faithful and trustworthy.

It could be what we believe about ourselves.

Do we believe we are worthy.

But we need people we trust to tell us, 'What you are believing is a lie'.

To get us out of deception.

SUMMERISE

Sin, at its core, has to be understood as a rupture in our relationship with God.

God will allow pressures in life to reveal these ruptures in our relationship with Him. Its never to shame us or punish us.

It is out of His kindness towards us that He leads us to repentance.

Repentance is to change the way you think' Or in other words: go back to God's perspective on reality.

See things as God sees them.

Because it leads to life!

Amen!