



**Second Sunday before
Lent**

**'Turn
from your wicked ways'**

Morning Prayer



*You are invited to guard time for us to be together, united in prayer in one faith,
to our one Lord. Dispersed community prayer at 10:30am.*

You may wish to prepare by lighting a candle

◆ denotes an optional pause to keep silence and meditate on the words

🔊 Denotes optional audio / video version from the church website:
<https://widcombe.church/our-churches/church-life/church-online/>

Preparation

O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Blessed are you, creator of all,
to you be praise and glory for ever.
As your dawn renews the face of the earth
bringing light and life to all creation,
may we rejoice in this day you have made;
as we wake refreshed from the depths of sleep,
open our eyes to behold your presence
and strengthen our hands to do your will,
that the world may rejoice and give you praise.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Blessed be God for ever.

after Lancelot Andrewes (1626)

A Song of David

*Splendour and majesty are yours, O God;
you are exalted as head over all.*

- 1 Blessed are you, God of Israel, for ever and ever, ◆
for yours is the greatness, the power,
the glory, the splendour and the majesty.
- 2 Everything in heaven and on earth is yours; ◆
yours is the kingdom, O Lord,
and you are exalted as head over all.
- 3 Riches and honour come from you ◆
and you rule over all.
- 4 In your hand are power and might; ◆
yours it is to give power and strength to all.
- 5 And now we give you thanks, our God, ◆
and praise your glorious name.
- 6 For all things come from you, ◆

and of your own have we given you.

1 Chronicles 29.10b-13,14b

*Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.*

*Splendour and majesty are yours, O God;
you are exalted as head over all.*

Opening prayer

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;
let us pray with one heart and mind.



As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

The Apostles' 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.

Hymn 

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,

Save me from its guilt and power.

Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfil Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All could never sin erase,
Thou must save, and save by grace.

Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace:
Foul, I to the fountain fly,
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyes shall close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.



The Word of God 

Epistle reading: Colossians 3: 1-10

Living as those made alive in Christ

3 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2** Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. **3** For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. **4** When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. **6** Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. **7** You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. **8** But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. **9** Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices **10** and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Gospel reading: Luke 13: 1-5

Repent or perish

13 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. **2** Jesus answered, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? **3** I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. **4** Or those eighteen who died

when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.'

Reflection from Revd Tim Buckley 🗣️

*"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and **turn from their wicked ways**, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."*

Just a brief reminder of the context of this passage: Under the leadership of King Solomon, Israel has just finished building the temple to the Lord, after which Solomon prays a prayer of dedication that imagines the times when God's people might abandon Him, forsake him and turn away from their faith in the Lord. In those days, Solomon acknowledges, they *will* end up reaping the hard consequences of their sin, but, if they repent and humble themselves and call upon the Lord, perhaps God, according to your nature You might still hear us? Would You answer Lord, and heal our land?

And so, God then comes to Solomon in the night with His answer - which is, "yes, I will hear and answer and heal... *if*... These are the certain conditions and prerequisites that we've been looking at over recent weeks, conditions that must be met for God to then unleash his mercy, forgiveness and healing. They're not conditions of bartering or negotiation, '*if you do this for me than I'll do this for you*'. No, these conditions simply realign our hearts with heaven if you like, they reset us back in the right and aligned place where we're able to receive that which God longs to pour out on us – His love and blessings.

So, over recent weeks, we've been looking at these conditions one by one and this morning we come to this condition: If My people... ***turn from their wicked ways***

Malachi 3:7 says this, "***Return to me and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty.***"

You cannot reverse that order. Though God is always reaching out with His love, you cannot ever know God's face, if your back is turned towards him. Turning from our wicked ways then, and "*re-turning*" to God, first begins with recognising, owning and admitting our fault and need of forgiveness. Until we acknowledge our sin, then repentance is meaningless.

Part of the problem is that sometimes it's possible to look at our sin in completely the wrong way, either rationalising or minimise our faults, or alternatively, desperate and hopelessly trying to make up for them, to work a way out of them. But both these attitudes can in turn can lead again to more problems. Firstly, we might consider others who are **REALLY** sinning – and think, well, I'm not as bad as that... we just assume therefore, that generally, we're therefore doing ok – not perfect, but spiritual enough, more or less good enough to win Gods approval and hopefully earn a place in heaven...

Two brothers were well known for their crooked business dealings, and both had ruined a lot of people's lives as they grew richer. Finally, one of the brothers died.

The surviving brother knew that he and his brother's reputation in the town was horrendous so he searched for a vicar who would give a eulogy that would hopefully improve his brother's image (and thereby more importantly improve his own) and so he tells the minister that he will give a vast amount of money to the church on the one condition that somewhere in the eulogy the vicar must refer to the deceased brother as 'a saint'. The Vicar looks at the leaky church roof and reluctantly agrees.

When the funeral service begins, the church is packed with townspeople holding their breath, desperate in their hope that the man's wicked character would finally be publicly exposed.

"The man you see here today, ready to be buried was a vile and debauched individual. He was a liar, a thief, a deceiver, a manipulator, a reprobate, and a hedonist. He destroyed the fortunes, careers, and lives of countless people in this town, many of whom are here today. This man did every dirty, rotten, unconscionable thing you can think of. But compared to his brother here in the front row, he was probably a saint."

Comparing yourself to others, especially in the sight of God is a dangerous thing!

But you know, some people in comparing themselves to others will *always* do so unfavourably and constantly feel unworthy, a failure or a fraud, and so endlessly have this striving ache to do better, to try harder, to be more holy, in the desperate hope that they might eventually 'get there'.

But this sort of endless striving in our own strength - and usually coming up short or ending up in endless circles of failure - the Bible clearly tells us is madness, as all our righteousness efforts, all our human best labours, is as filthy rags to God - good works, will *never* be enough...

There won't be any comparisons on Judgment Day. Each person will have to stand before a holy God and answer for his or her life and God doesn't grade us on a curve. The only standard God uses is His own Gold standard, the perfect sinlessness standard of His Son. In spiritual terms, 99.99% achievement is still a failure - that's why the Law was given as a plumb line to show us our inherent capacity to stumble and fall despite our best efforts and show us our unquestionable need for God's solution - Christ crucified. No one can be saved by doing enough good to outweigh the bad...But there is of course good news. The good news is that out of love for lost and helpless sinners, Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, came to earth and lived the perfect life, pleasing His Father in every way, perfectly and then paid for our sin on the cross so that anyone who believes in Jesus will be saved from God's judgment.

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." We're told in Mark 1:15

Faith in Christ and repenting from our sin are two sides of the same coin. There's no genuine repentance without faith, and no genuine faith without repentance.

True repentance means you can get that heart back on fire for God. You start to love God again with all your heart, which is why God said in Joel 2:12-13, *"Even now", declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend you heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity."*

When we repentantly turn our faces back to God, we turn our hearts back to Him

2 Chronicles 7:14 then, amidst the hopes and horror, triumph and turmoil, was God's invitation to his chosen people thousands of years ago to return to Him. In these our days, some millennia later, days of upheaval, trial, despair and anguish, the answer to the problems that our world faces, are not more bombs, more knowledge, or distractions or political solutions - No, God is still on His throne, and for all of us as his creation before Him, the only real solution is in that same invitation which is still made today.

If My people...turn from their wicked ways... I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

God wants us to get down on our knees and pray. He calls us to pray as individuals, as a church and as a nation. We are to be humble, to pray, to seek his face and turn away from sin. For that concept of turning in the Bible *is* the concept of repentance. In the New Testament the Greek word for repentance, *'metanoia'* is a military term and means "about face". It means if you are travelling in one direction and the commander says 'about face', you turn 180° and you go in completely the opposite direction.

David in Psalm 139:23-24 says, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*" So why not start today by giving God permission to show you anything in your heart right now that displeases him.

Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's prompting. John says in 16:8, "*When he (the Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin.*" It might be through a sermon or a song or a specific prick of conviction felt in your heart, along with an awareness of what it is you need to turn from.

If so, confess it straight away, you don't need to collect a litany of sins that you store up till a Sunday service's time of confession. In this, 1 John 1:9 reassures us, "*If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*". So let's keep short accounts with God – being quick to repent, to turn from our sin, and turn towards the Good Good Father.

For the truth is, we're all in this boat, this struggle to battle in this fallen sinful world. "*If anyone says he has not sinned*", says John in verse 8, "*he's a liar and the truth is not in him.*" So, we may not be easily able to live without sin, but we can live lives without *staying* in sin...It's like the story of the man who spoke to a young boy sitting next a small pond. Wanting to know how deep the water was he asks, "if I fell in here would I drown?" To which the boy replies, "No sir, you wouldn't drown if you fell in. You'd drown if you stayed under."

It's not our stumbles with sin that will undo us, the cross offers victory for us in that. It's staying under that will kill your soul.

So, let us repent - turn from our wicked ways, finding freedom and forgiveness as we seek the very face of God our merciful redeemer, our King, our Saviour.

In the words of Hebrews 12: *Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles... Let's run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith...Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

For *If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Amen.

Intercessions

Let us pray.

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen**



The Collect

Almighty God,
you have created the heavens and the earth
and made us in your own image:
teach us to discern your hand in all your works
and your likeness in all your children;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all things,
now and for ever.
Amen.

Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

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.



To Conclude

The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life.
Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

If My people
who are called by My name,
will humble themselves
& pray, and seek My face,
& turn from their wicked ways,
then I will hear from heaven
& will forgive their sin,
& will heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14