

WELCOME 5th March 2025 – ASH WEDNESDAY '25 C

Psalm 51:1-17 & Psalm 103

Good evening & Welcome to worship on this Ash Wednesday!

Multitasking I don't care who you are...when our attention is divided...our thoughts unfocussed...our devotion split...we lose...as do those around us. Our hearts were designed...our lives crafted for exclusive singleness in thought word & deed. We are at our best when our affection, devotion, & attention are whole-hearted.

The history behind Psalm 51...which we'll hear in a moment...is of David, King of Israel, multitasking: **In** *the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab & the Israelite army to fight the Ammonites...David however, stayed behind in Jerusalem.* He's added to his warrior kingly role that of palace administrator & during an afternoon walk spies Bathsheba undergoing a purification bathing ritual... We know the rest... adultery, deception, murder & guilt. Before God & the prophet Nathan (not to mention Bathsheba & her dead husband Uriah) Ps 51 is the result.

A divided heart...pursuing its own ends is death. But tonight we get to stand w/ David in **WHOLE-HEARTED REPENTANCE**: **For** *I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day & night. Against you, & you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight."*

Tonight we hear the good news of the violent overthrow of the kingdom of me by the grace/mercy of God. Tonight we celebrate the fall of the tyranny of me under the reign of Christ. Tonight we rejoice the dictatorship of me is routed by the blood of Jesus.

A life of following Jesus is an intentional journey in grace, a deliberate way of living that daily strips away the obstacles & obstructions in our lives – plants in us the lifestyle behaviour & practices we learn from Jesus **AND** increases in us the likeness of Jesus. Repentance unifies our hearts, minds, & daily living into a journey of joy... a lifestyle & a lifetime of taking our cues from him... a daily recalibration of attitudes values beliefs hopes aspirations & behaviour until there is nothing left but his life lived through ours.

Repentance to the way of Jesus brings wholeness & restores life...the Father's correction saves from danger & death & transforms our hearts - shapes our lives as we are given power & authority to invite others to join us on the way of Jesus.

Please stand as we sing...

ASH WEDNESDAY '25 C – WHOLE-HEARTED REPENTANCE

For a moment last week I thought I was going to die...& it had nothing to do w/ "P"-plate drivers...I was on my bike...on the trail no less where it turns from alongside Red Hill Rd to alongside Glenfield Rd. The City is doing some drainage work in the big ditch there & w/ no warning blocked the bike/hike path. So as I rounded the curve at top speed I confronted a closed gate. I had 3 choices: crash into the gate – avoid the gate & roll into the big ditch – brake hard & hope not to fall over. Fortunately choice 3 kept me from harm...but my blood pressure went up a bit. About that moment a City of VVW truck pulled in behind me & I explained quite fervently to the young man in the truck that some warning signs might have been helpful. I have a feeling he was the apprentice returning from a coffee run for the boss...he shrugged, mumbled that they had closed the gate & kept driving.

I was genuinely surprised...We live in a world of risk assessments & warnings. We've got a whole language...whole systems of communication developed for raising the alert when health or well-being is threatened. We post signs - put up billboards...string yellow or orange tape...erect bollards & string bunting. We spend millions telling ourselves how bad smoking is & millions more warning about the dangers of speeding our bowel cancer...What we seem *NOT SO GOOD AT* is posting moral or spiritual warning signs for each other.

Seriously...when was the last time you actually sought out a friend or family member you knew had *"given up the habit of meeting together"* w/ other Christians & invited them back to worship? (challenged them spiritually) When was the last time someone challenged you on your prayer life or your generosity? We've learned not to talk much about our faith & our hope in Christ alone & his call to whole-hearted obedience to his way for fear we might be thought of as overbearing or phobic in some sense. My mother confessed to me she's engaging in a *subversive ministry*...encouraging one of my nephews to give up this "living together" business & get married...When you're 94 I guess you can get away w/ it?

In 1973, Arthur Meninger published *"WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN?"* He was ahead of his time...We fail, he contends to admonish, correct, instruct, object. He condemned the fad of calling "sin" – moral failure – everything but...We don't talk about it in anything other than general terms & excuse it under the whitewash of trauma, inclination, or self-expression. And when pushed, or challenged, we pull out the safe & tested, "Well, that may be but...I'm not as bad as those folks." We divide the world comfortably b/t the "excusably guilty" & the *"REALLY GUILTY."* And you know where we put ourselves.

Tonight...God will have no evasions explanations or excuses. *"For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day & night. Against you, & you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight."* And what is needed...*Purify me from my sins, & I will be clean; wash me, & I will be whiter than snow...Remove the stain of my guilt. Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me...Restore to me the joy of your salvation, & make me willing to obey you.* As those who plead w/ David & find the cross of Jesus Christ as God's reply we echo Paul, *"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God."*

But you can't be reconciled & keep on the same path...the way ahead w/ self in the driver's seat is a guaranteed crash unto death. Like me on my bike...we have to turn around away from the danger of self-rule – away from the sure crash of thinking we can follow a divided path of multiple affections & devotions & loves...Repentance is needed...God's call from near every page of Scripture is out of self-centeredness to repentance & faith - turning away from self/death & turning toward Christ/life.

A pastor I know says: **Sin** is what you do when your heart is not satisfied with God. No one sins out of obligation or duty. We sin because it holds out some promise of satisfaction. **That** promise enslaves us until we are led to know that God is more to be desired than life itself (Ps 63:3). Which means the power of sin's promise is broken by the power of God's. -- John Piper

Sin is destructive – chokes the life right out of us – binds us traps us trips us & tricks us into thinking we can control it manage it contain it...deal with it do away w/ it...Sin is that natural inclination of our hearts to be God for ourselves. It is as simple as that. I, you, we, in thought word & deed decide at our core to live for our own ends desires aspirations...that we are not satisfied w/ God & can do better on our own...some other promise of satisfaction wins our affection – attention – devotion...

Sin is both disease **AND** symptom...illness **AND** the issue. But sin is not just us at our worst...it is also us at our very best when we try to use our very best to bend God to our needs...get God to spin the world in our favour...when we use our best to gain some advantage...To repent is to acknowledge my fault, **AND ALSO** my desire for a different course of action - pattern of living. To make better use of this life is where repentance aims me/you. To receive the gift of forgiveness & new life & the strength to struggle against my/your own worst is where repentance points us. Repentance continually drives me to the cross, to the font, to the table & to the community of the repentant where we are free to acknowledge the worst about ourselves because we know the best of God.

“For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be sin for us so that we could become the righteousness of God.” On the cross, Jesus literally became sin – took my rebellion, my twisted self-interested heart, my misdirected trust/idolatry into himself so that he could remake me in his image, rebuild me in his righteousness, recreate in me his relationship w/ God the Father. He does that to all of us. I am/you are a child of God only because God punishes sin by the life/death/rez/rule of Jesus Christ. I am/you are a child of God only because God destroys death & defeats evil by the life/death/rez/rule of Jesus Christ. Only through Jesus does God crush hell - fling wide His Kingdom’s gates – and release us to live that life of His Kingdom on the streets of Wagga Wagga...

The Lord is compassionate & merciful, slow to get angry & filled with unfailing love. He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal with us, as we deserve. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for us. He has removed our sin from us as far as the east is from the west. As a father has compassion on his children, God has compassion on us!

Let’s pray...

Heavenly Father you have spoken to us saying *“Turn to me w/ your whole heart; w/ fasting, w/ weeping, & w/ mourning. Rend your hearts not your garments”* We turn to you now seeking forgiveness & restoration – longing for healing & hope – searching for meaning & purpose in our lives & the lives of those we love. By your Son deliver us from the power of the evil one. Save us from sin & death. Breathe new life into us & strengthen our wills to surrender our lives solely to you. Tonight yes...but everyday according to your power & great love for the sake of sharing what we have been given freely w/ those around us...in Jesus we pray...Amen