

Transcript – Week 3 Message from Bishop Richard

Hello everyone. I do hope you are bearing up two weeks in to our restrictions. Its hard for everyone, but I'm constantly encouraged by the creativity and sheer ingenuity people are exercising to continue connecting and caring for one another.

Last weekend, Bishops in the Anglican Communion called us all to repentance and prayer. Repentance is entirely appropriate for the season of Lent which draws to a close as we enter into Holy Week. However, it's a word that is often misunderstood. Sometimes its used as shorthand for saying sorry. This doesn't quite capture the NT dynamic. Sometimes its had an unfortunate association with fire and Brimstone preachers haranguing us, demanding a change of life. A story is told of Ian Paisley, full of wrath and indignation, preaching that 'in Hell there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth'. A little old lady at the back put her hand up to protest that she didn't have any teeth, to which he responded, "teeth will be provided." But this sort of call to repentance sometimes feels like telling an alcoholic to stop drinking. It's not likely to be very effective. In fact, it often leaves people feeling condemned, worthless and despairing. It can paint a picture of God as a harsh, taskmaster, sitting on a cloud with a sharp stick meeting out punishment when we get things wrong.

There's no doubt that repentance was central to Jesus preaching. In Mark Chapter 1:14 he sets out his message clearly, "The time has come, the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news." The Greek word for repent in the original text: 'metanoia', literally means change your mind. Jesus is saying that in his arrival into the world a new reality has dawned and we need to change our minds to live in the light of it. We are having to undergo a sort of metanoia/ repentance as a result of the coronavirus. You may have caught yourself thinking, "Oh, I just need to nip out and do that errand, or I must go and see that person, and realise you can't. For a time, reality has changed, and we need to change accordingly. But Jesus arrival means things have changed irrevocably and forever. When you were around Jesus this was obvious. Lame people started walking; deaf people started hearing and blind people started seeing; with the occasional person coming back to life again. This was the kingdom of God, God's rule and authority breaking into the created order in a new way, focussed on the person of Jesus.

Jesus shows us that humility, kindness, love and vulnerability aren't disguises for God, and the real God really does have a white beard and sharp stick. They show us that's what God is like in his very essence. Repentance is to live differently in the light of this reality. Jesus shows us that we are truly secure in his love for us. We're secure in a love that goes to the uttermost on the cross giving himself for us. We are truly significant: the smallest person



matters and has value. If we truly repented – lived in the light of this, there'd be no need for ego driven posturing; we'd be freed to be generous because we trusted in God's provision, we'd be truly freed to love, secure in the one who loves us. And we wouldn't need to conceal and pretend our sins and failings because we'd see God's love and grace as so accepting that we'd know forgiveness was available not condemnation.

You see repentance isn't a one off, it's a continual recalibration of our minds into the new reality of God's love shown us in Jesus Christ. I'd love us to do a lot of repenting – but repenting as Jesus meant us to, not beating ourselves up. As we enter into Holy Week we'll reflect together on the extravagant, mind-boggling, undeserving, grace-filled mercy and love of God. Christian faith is living and responding to that reality and sharing it with others. We're a people who have tasted that forgiveness. It's a gift which we could never have earned and it's a gift that God wants to give to everyone. May our repentance foster a transformation of hearts that truly commends this love to others.

Have a great Holy week.

+Richard