

**I pray that I may speak in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.**

Did you have some pancakes on Shrove Tuesday? Did you see the article in the Church Magazine about how it got its name from ‘shriving’? This is a 1,000 year old practice which involves confessing our mistakes, and receiving absolution for them before Lent begins.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent and it derives its name from the placing of the ashes of repentance in the sign of the cross on our foreheads is a sign of our mortality, based upon the idea from the book of Genesis that humankind was created by God from the dust of the world and will return to it. The words "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return" : "Repent, and believe in the Gospel" provides a reminder that only Jesus can bring freedom from sin through his death of the cross.

At work this is the time for Personal Development Reviews looking back over last year and thinking about objectives for the coming year. So for me its an opportunity to have a spiritual 360. It is also a reminder of the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness learning how to overcome temptation and resist the darkness of evil. It's why many Christians like to use this time to fast and pray.

We have some powerful readings this evening of God's awesome graciousness. In the book of Joel there is a reminder that it is never too late to turn to him even as the Day of the Lord approaches. Paul brings this up to the moment for the Corinthians' reminding them that even now is the acceptable time to repent and be find forgiveness so that we can all live our lives with the spiritual richness that we will take with us into eternity. In Jesus' dealings with the woman caught in adultery we see grace in action, defusing a hostile and potentially fatal encounter where at the end only she and the Lord are left standing.

In our Old Testament reading the prophet Joel foresaw the awesomeness of the Day of the Lord when everyone will be called to account but Joel also sees the awesome graciousness of God.

Even then YHWH was leaving the door open to those who return to him. The same is true today. God wants us to open our hearts to him and to come before him in a holy assembly such as today because he is and always will be a compassionate and loving Heavenly Father. May we use this Lenten season to grow closer to him?

God wants us to be reconciled with him and with each other. We are all as unworthy as the next person, yet Jesus calls us to be his disciples and even to be his ambassadors, we just need to accept the grace of God which is on offer. Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation says Paul when writing to the Corinthian church. We live in the age of grace between Jesus' first earthly visit and his last of which Joel spoke. Living as ambassadors of Christ, Paul is very concerned that we should have exemplary lives because he does not want our ministry to be discredited. In all the highs and lows of his existence Paul knew that True wealth did not consist of worldly possessions but in being rich towards God for even if a believer has no world's goods they have everything to look forward to in the world to come.

Our Gospel Reading may not have originally belonged to John but it is considered to be authentic. It has many similarities to the stories in Luke. It concerns a married woman who is accused of committing Adultery. Compromising circumstances were not sufficient evidence, Jewish law required witnesses and the law required both parties to be accused and punished but somehow the man had escaped. The teachers of the law were out to trap Jesus.

The Romans did not allow the Jews to carry out death sentences so if Jesus had said to stone her he could have been in conflict with the Romans. If he had said not to stone her, he could have been accused of being unsupportive of the Jewish law.

Jesus' silence makes the story more interesting. Perhaps what he was writing referred to Jer 17:13 “those who turn away from me shall be written on the earth” The accusers are not the appropriate people to be judges. Jesus' answer disarms

them. Since he spoke of throwing a stone, he could not be accused of failure to uphold the law, but the qualification for throwing the stone prevented anyone from acting for his phrase “without sin” means quite generally “without any sin”.

So the crowd began to disperse as they recognised they were not without sin and would one day have to face God’s judgement for their own sins. Eventually only Jesus and the woman are left. The din of the crowd silenced Jesus says from now on do not sin again. In true synoptic tradition He is able to forgive her sins as he is able to forgive us ours.

Today marks the start of the season on lent, what you choose to do with this opportunity is up to you. There are many personal daily devotional materials available. We will be running a series weekly studies based on the Diocesan lent course on Wed evenings and Frid afternoons. Booklets are available as you leave this evening.

(At the moment) Soon we (will) bear the visible sign of cross of Christ which will wash off, may we never lose the sign of Cross which we were given at our baptisms where we promised to turn to Christ, submit to Christ and come Christ who is the way the truth and the Life.

Let’s thank God for his awesome graciousness.

Amen. [1001]