

First Sunday in Lent – 22 February, 2015

This is the first Sunday in the church season we call Lent. There are six Sundays in Lent including Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week, which leads on to Easter Day. Lent is a time for reflection, and hopefully positive change and renewal.

Last week we read about a voice in the cloud telling the disciples to listen to what Jesus had to say.

Today Jesus speaks, so as we are also followers of Christ, we should also listen to what Mark records him as saying.

“The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Now repent-repentance is a very Lenten word, so it seemed to me that we should learn a bit more about what it means to repent

To find out more about repentance I opened a book I have had on my shelves rarely opened for decades.

This is it –

The Hodder Dictionary of Bible Themes – *An instantly accessible and easy to use tool for Bible study.* Don't believe it. It's a bit like a thesaurus. You never quite know where things and words are.

However I was more persistent this time and beside the number 6732 I found the word Repentance, which is defined as

A change of mind leading to a change of action. It involves a sincere turning from sin to serve God and includes sorrow for,

and confession of, sin and where possible restitution.

You won't get a much better short definition of repentance than that.

So repentance involves action and change. Not just sorrowful and guilty thoughts leading to confession, not just giving up chocolate or wine for 40 days, but real permanent change in the way we think and live.

It also includes recognising certain actions as sins. Now Sin is also a very Lenten word!

So I looked sin up as well, and beside the number 6020 I read:

'Primarily a wrong relationship with God, which may express itself in wrong attitudes or actions towards God himself, other human beings, possessions or the environment. Scripture stresses that this condition is deeply rooted in human nature, and that only God is able to break its penalty, power and presence.

Then followed over ten pages of very small print dealing with sin.

Often Lent seems to be all about SIN

What we should not be doing...

What we should be doing...

We always seem to be so far from what we should be like...

It is so hard to get to where we should be.

I have to confess that I never seem to live up to my Lenten intentions – even during Lent!

It's a bit depressing.

However, I had a dim memory of another definition of sin which had to do with 'missing the mark', like an arrow missing its target. That made me feel better, but at

First I could not find anything like this in the ten pages about sin which followed.

Amen

Then I came across a tiny paragraph in italics which read:

Falling short of a standard - Romans 3:23
The words most commonly used for "sin" in the Old Testament and New Testament originally signified "missing the mark".

Well it seems to me that if that meaning was good enough for the original writers of the bible it was good enough for me.

I invite you to consider doing the same.

I will include these two definitions in next week's pew sheet. Do please enter into dialogue with me and each other if you find other definitions of these two words more helpful.

During the weeks ahead I invite you to join with me in putting time aside each day to reflect on your life, and recall times when you fell short, you missed the mark, you overlooked someone's need because you were too busy meeting your own needs.

Make a list and then make another list of what you can do to make amends.

Let us go on this Lenten journey together, supporting each other as we seek to change our minds so that we change the way we act. Let us try harder to keep our promises to ourselves and others.

To help us keep our promises we would do well to remember the final verse of Robert Frost's poem

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

**The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.**