

EPISTLE READING 2 Corinthians 5:20b—6:10 (NRSV)

²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

⁶As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For he says,

“At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ⁸We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

GOSPEL READING Mark 1:9-14 (NRSV)

The Baptism of Jesus

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

The Temptation of Jesus

¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.



Finding Your Life: Listen Deeply

Breathe deeply.....Listen deeply.....

Thank you, God, our Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, for the gift of this day.

Help us to see the blessings of today’s work or leisure.

Help us to feel the warmth of relationships

And commit to strengthening those that are cool.

Help us to receive more fully the kindness and benevolence of others.

For on this day when Ashes may overshadow Valentines

May we feel your love covering all our sins.

Brief silence

Amen.

***"This is the kind of fast day I'm after: to break the chains of injustice,
Get rid of exploitation in the workplace,
Free the oppressed, cancel debts.
What I'm interested in seeing you do is:
Sharing your food with the hungry,
Inviting the homeless poor into your homes,
Putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,
Being available to your own families.
Do this and the lights will turn on,
and your lives will turn around at once.
Your righteousness will pave your way.
The God of glory will secure your passage."***

Isaiah 58: 6-8 – *The Message*

As we begin this season of Lent on this Ash Wednesday, we are reminded by the prophet Isaiah to begin with repentance: that turning from sin and evil to face the God of loving grace. For centuries, followers of Jesus saw this season of repentance and preparation as a time of performing pious rituals in order to avoid wallowing in the guilt of our own sinfulness. But in these scripture texts from Isaiah, from Paul, and Mark's gospel we are reminded that God does not desire or require acts of repentance which are devoid of meaning and do not result in holy living. We are encouraged to engage in spiritual disciplines which will forever influence our living in the ways of God.

Isaiah offers to his hearers an alternative to empty, pious rituals. When one feels the burden of guilt caused by sin, that person should repent before the Lord, and then go forth as a changed person, with changed behavior. That person's INTENTIONS should be different in the future, and those intentions should be FOLLOWED-THROUGH with actions of righteousness and mercy.

Historically, in the UMC and its predecessor denominations, the words of invitation which preceded the Lord's Supper were issued to "all ye who do truly and earnestly repent of your sin...and intend to lead a new life..." At that point, the intention is enough to make us welcome at the communion meal. That is probably because with positive intentions, we are in a state of mind that has the potential to bring about positive actions. ***Intention is the energy of repentance.*** Intention is what brings families to the baptismal font. It is what will bring many, even today, to receive the imposition of ashes.

You may remember then that after encountering the grace and forgiveness given to us so generously by God, we should go forth changed, inside and out! As we follow-through with the

Finding Your Life: Listening Deeply

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sharing of what we have received, we have the opportunity to make faith real for those we encounter.

LISTEN! The scriptures we read and hold dear...the teachings that bring the scriptures to life...the voice of God speaking amid the clamor of our busy lives...all point us in the direction of continuing to learn and grow, and be shaped by God's love and mercy. LISTEN! REPENT! CHANGE!

So, let me make a suggestion here: LISTEN for what God is calling you to do and be and change during this season of Lent! God may well be calling us to address the needs of those suffering from injustice, lack of resources, need for care.

Bennett Cerf tells a story about a cold day in police court when a trembling old man was brought before then NYC Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. In this scene, which likely took place in the mid-1930's, the man pleaded for leniency. He was stealing bread because his family was starving.

"I've got to punish you," declared LaGuardia. "The law makes no exception. I can do nothing but sentence you to a fine of \$10." But LaGuardia reached into his own pocket as he added, "Well, here's the \$10 to pay your fine. And now I remit the fine." He then tossed another \$10 bill to the old man.

"Furthermore," he declared, "I'm going to fine everybody in this courtroom 50 cents for living in a city where a man has to steal bread in order to eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant!" The hat was passed, and a shocked old man left the courtroom with \$47.50 (which today would be worth just over \$900!) LaGuardia thus repented, in his own way, for the sin of his societal systems, and made a positive difference in the lives of at least one family.

BREATHE! LISTEN! REPENT! CHANGE!

Right intentions without results are empty.

Results without right intentions are manipulative.

But right intentions with appropriate results are what repentance is all about.

It is the way to live a holy life.

Breathe deeply ... Listen deeply

Holy Spirit, help us attune to your presence.

We choose to welcome and become your love.

We choose to express and share your love.

We are willing and waiting to be a Conduit of your Divine Love.

God, help us to gain clarity, to see with curiosity before judgment,

to learn and grow.

We know you are always near, closer than our own breath.

Breathe deeply

Amen.