

Ash Wednesday Meditation

Ash Wednesday marks the first day of Lent, the season of 40 days preceding Easter. For centuries this has been cultivated as a season of preparation, and spiritual practice such as prayer and fasting. In the gospel stories of the life of Jesus this season is rooted in the point, mid-way through the story, in which Jesus turns his face towards Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), the cross and the revelation of meaning through suffering, life through death, the last being first and the first last.

Sin. In Hebrew חַטָּא pronounced /chata/; in Greek ἀμαρτάνω pronounced /hamartanó/. In both languages the word literally means to miss the mark, as in an archer going astray, missing the intended target. It points to a failure, a loss of focus or objective, as well as to our own mortality and limited power. It's a doing wrong that then has both seen and unforeseen consequences.

Repentance is key to the teaching of the Way of Jesus (Mark 1:14-15). In the gospels, originally written in Greek, the word for repentance is μετάνοια pronounced /metanoieó/. It means a change or turn of mind. It can literally be understood to mean to realize that the direction in which you're headed is wrong, inadequate, not wanted, and so a course correction is made – as in a U-Turn. It can have to do with a radical transformation of one's point-of-view, actions, priorities, worldview, relational investment.

Reflective Meditation:

- Take a moment to silence and still yourself. Then re-read the definition of repentance and sin.
- Take 2-5 minutes with eyes closed or gaze lowered and meditate on the first word (sin) taking into consideration the definition you've read of sin and your life experiences.
 - Consider places in your own story, life, work, relationships, priorities, choices where you have had an embodied experience of the word sin – where you've felt like you've missed the mark.
 - Consider places in our church community, our city, or nation, our world, where this has happened or may be happening.
- Do the same thing reflecting upon the word repentance.
 - Consider places in your own story, life, work, relationships, priorities, choices where you have had an embodied experience of this word – or where you may need to repent, change your mind, or make a U-turn.
 - Consider places in our church community, our city, or nation, our world, where this has happened or may need to happen.
- Pray through, or journal, your response to this prompt: What do you want to repent of, change in your inner being and way of life? What specific action can you take (or contribute) to address the sin in your life, our community of faith, or our world?
- Give thanks for this time of reflection and meditation. Ask for the strength to act upon your intention. You may want to return to this prayer intention through the season of Lent up until Easter (March 31st this year).