

# Death and Resurrection – *John 12:30-36*

. [Please note these are unedited preaching notes and are not for publication. They are made available here to aid the deaf community in Christ Church and to be a reference for anyone who found the sermons useful.]

## Introduction

SCIENCE says: You are just a pile of dust. Just a collection of elements. In fact, DID YOU KNOW THAT... ***the average human body contains:***

enough Sulphur to kill all the fleas on an average dog;

enough Potassium to fire a toy canon;

enough Fat to make seven bars of soap;

enough Phosphorous to make 2,200 match heads;

enough Water to nearly fill a forty litre tank;

enough Carbon to make 900 pencils.

Amazing! The human body is a remarkable – a complex and beautiful gift. But strangely enough those facts don't do much for your self esteem! To think of yourself in those terms.

And strangely enough the same view can be found in the Bible: Psalm 103, verse 14

*“For he knows how we are formed – he knows that we are but dust.”*

AND YET the message of the Bible says that we are body, mind and spirit – and that God sees us as SO MUCH MORE than merely a pile of dust!

## JOHN 12:23-26

The verses read to us from John's gospel this morning come to the very heart of the gospel message that is about God reaching us – body, mind AND spirit.

Some Greek people trying to meet with Jesus spark off this response in Jesus:

*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.*

In just a few words Jesus sums up the saving work that must take place in order to restore the relationship of God the Father and Creator, with his creation.

Eugene Peterson, in his translation of the Bible, puts it like this:

*“Listen Carefully. Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you’ll have it forever, real and eternal.”*

The invitation to us is to follow in his footsteps: to “die to the world” in order to “live for Christ.”

And that is what Baptism is all about. This morning we are welcoming into the family of the Church four children who are going to be either baptised or dedicated.

Baptism is for these parents a way of saying, like Joshua: *“As for me and my household – we will serve the Lord.”* And it holds in the image of going into water – a picture of death and life: of being dead and buried to the ways of sin and that part of the world that has rejected God, and being raised out of the water to new life in Christ.

In Joshua 1 & 2 we read that it was by the Jordan that the Israelites renewed their covenant with God before passing westward into the promised land. They had to pass through the waters into a new life.

And its at the Jordan where we find John the Baptist calling people again to renew their covenant with God again – this time through a baptism of repentance.

Now when you wash your dirty hands you can see the results immediately. But repentance happens inside with a cleansing that isn't seen right away. And so John used a symbolic action that people could see – to signify an inner cleaning. It wasn't a sign unfamiliar to the Jews – they used a water baptism to initiate converts to the Jewish faith.

## 1. Confess your sin

The Hebrew word for 'repent' – means to 'turn back' or 'to return', to 'restore'. It implies that our natural created state was for good and living to please our creator; but due to the corruption from sin we have come to face the other way and need to 'RE-turn' to God.

So the first part is : confessing, **turning from our sin.**

**[2 students and a cookbook]** There were once two students who were chatting. One of them said, 'I was given a cookbook for Christmas, but I can never do anything with it.'

'What, too much fancy work in it?' asked the other.

'No,' replied the first. 'Every one of the recipes begins the same way: 'Take a clean dish.'"

And like those who came to John for baptism, OUR lives need cleansing. God says, 'Take a clean life,' and that's a problem, because the Bible tells us (*in the New Living Translation*) that 'ALL have sinned and 'fall short of God's glorious standard.' We can't find a clean dish!

All of our lives have been tainted by sin. In fact Jesus didn't have too much time for those who felt they were perfect and had no sin – he said its only the sick who need a doctor.

So when John the Baptist saw the Pharisees and Sadducees while he was preaching and baptising, he turned to them and said (Matthew 3:7): "*You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance!*"

God was not interested in their religious activities and their pious pretensions! Even they would eventually have to face God's judgement.

You see - we're a bit like snowflakes. Their crystal formations are beautiful. Each is unique, with a different shape and size; but they all have one thing in common: they have dirty hearts. In fact, the centre of every snowflake has a dirt or dust particle, which holds it all together. (I read this about snowflake formation: "The water enters a super-cooled state and snowflake formation takes place upon air-borne microscopic dust particles acting as nuclei for condensation.")

Each one of us has a dirty heart. We are the greatest of all creation, God's pride and joy, and every single one of us is – amazingly – unique. Yet we all have a common thread: sin. Every one of us is also marked by sin. And sadly, sin is dirty. It's filthy, and it stains our lives.

We try to deal with our guilt in a lot of different ways. We try to cover it up with good or kind actions, thinking: 'If I do enough good deeds, I can balance the scales in my favour.' But good deeds won't, in the end, do away with our guilt.

Our tendency is to rationalise, explain, excuse, defend or justify our actions.

CS Lewis wrote: *'We have a strange illusion that mere time cancels sin, but, mere time does nothing either to the fact or guilt of sin. The guilt is washed out not by time, but by repentance and the blood of Christ.'*

Only what God has done for us through the sacrifice Jesus offered on the cross can take away the sin and the guilt. The Bible says, 'The blood of Jesus Christ... cleanses us from every sin' (1 Jn.1:7). It's very good news for us, because there is no other way to receive forgiveness.

David, after committing the sins of adultery, deception and murder, had a heart – full of guilt – hardened towards God. In Psalm 32 you can read how David felt when he tried to cover up his sin: *"When I refused to confess my sin – I was weak and miserable and I groaned all day long."*

And he lived with that for a year. Till God, in his mercy, sends along the prophet Nathan to confront David about his sin. It is then that King David approaches God with the prayer which is Psalm 51 – a very personal prayer of confession, saying:

*“Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.... Create in me a pure heart O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”*

*So firstly, we confess our sins.*

## **2. Accepting God’s forgiveness**

You see how there are two distinct parts to this DYING OF A SEED/DYING TO SELF: there is the free sovereign act of God’s mercy as he has made a way for us to turn to him in repentance; and there is a decision to turn towards God. And we find again and again this link between confessing of sins and God’s forgiveness. Confession belongs to repentance and is necessary in order to receive God’s forgiveness.

When we trip up, deliberately do the wrong thing and fall away from God it’s just like being left out in the cold...and we wonder why the sin seemed so attractive at the time. But God’s grace and forgiveness is so far-reaching and never-ending that there’s always enough of it to go round. Repentance isn’t just about beating yourself up with guilt...which is something we all tend to do. It’s about going straight to God and saying sorry...and a second harder part.....showing that we are indeed sorry by deciding to live differently. The Greek word for repentance is ‘metanoia’, which means a complete change of mind/heart. That’s the difficult part...but we have a lifetime to work at it.

According to Matthew 3 John was not specific about “the fruits of repentance,” except in his call for baptism with water. However Luke’s account includes the question from the crowd: “What should we do then?” To which John answers:

“The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.” And to the tax collectors: “Don’t collect any more than you are required to.” And to the soldiers: “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.”

In other words: Come and say sorry to God – by all means. But don't do it unless you really mean it and are prepared to live differently. And that active attitude of repentance was to be set in stone by the waters of baptism as a sign or 'RE-TURNING' to God.

We often think that God likes to hang on to our sin for some kind of spiritual blackmail... 'just in case.' We find it hard to believe that he does not.

But when we confess our sin to God – when we turn to him in repentance - we discover (Psalm 103) that *“He does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions (or sin) from us.”*

And in Jeremiah 31: *“I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”*

Concentration camp survivor, Corrie ten Boom, put it like this: *“God takes our sin and buries it at the bottom of the deepest sea. And then he puts up a sign saying ‘NO FISHING!’”* It's done! God does not require us to keep dragging up our sin.

Jesus died once for all – for ALL sin. He won't be coming back to die again – it was more than enough the first time. And if we go back again and again to dig it up – it's as if we're saying to God – *‘The cross was not enough for me.’*

So we can drop our heavy bags of guilt and we can walk away free – no grovelling necessary!

*So we must confess our sins AND then accept that God HAS forgiven us. The slate has been wiped clean!*

### **3. Living differently**

*But thirdly, we are called to live differently.*

The prophets were known for calling the Israelites back to repentance. Ezekiel beckoned the Israelites a number of times:

*“Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce your detestable practices.”*

And it not only implied a change of heart – but a change of behaviour, such as we see in Isaiah Chapter 1:

*“Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless. Plead the case of the widow.”*

So often we think that saying sorry to God is merely about a moment of telling God in prayer how regretful we are for something. But he wants more from us – he wants us to stop living selfishly for ourselves, and change our hearts, attitudes and behaviour, in a way that shows that the things that matter to God – matter to us.

That doesn't just mean throwing our money at worthwhile causes. Many of us are not in any kind of relationship with people who are not like us. And what shows someone that they matter in any relationship?? But that we spend time with them. Spending time with people who are not like us: that's what the God of justice and mercy would be doing if he was walking our earth in the flesh today.

And the amazing thing is that he IS. Jesus Christ is incarnated in the world in the flesh and blood of his body the church – which spends much time with the lonely, the broken, the hungry, the homeless, the orphan, the widow today. And the question we must ask ourselves is this: are we too walking that road? Each one of us is called to live out our repentance.

## **Conclusion**

COME ON THE ALPHA COURSE. You can be loved. Forgiven. Freed.

### **[SHOW CREATION OF ADAM]**

Just one last thought – it's arguably one of the most famous and most appreciated images in the world. Michael Angelo's *Creation of Adam* on the ceiling of the Cistine Chapel. It illustrates God the Father breathing life into Adam, the first man. Humanity formed in the dirt. Adam's name comes from the Hebrew word – *adaama* – meaning earth. Adam is quite literally the world's first dust-man in the world.

One theory of the meaning of the fresco – is that God’s position in the piece is one of full outreach. Indicating that he is making every effort to reach out to Adam. To touch him. To bring new life. The new life of the divine spirit coming to Adam’s organic body.

Adam meanwhile with his loose arm and hand - seems relaxed – seems a bit too relaxed. It doesn’t seem to matter though. The message is clear – ALL that humanity has to do is to reach out to God. And he will be there. Reaching out to us. He’s in death and resurrection business.