

Ash Wednesday
Sermon text: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21
Date preached: February 10, 2016
Sermon title: "Judging repentance".

"Seeing is believing."

"I'll believe it when I see it".

"Prove it."

"Fool me once shame on you. Fool me twice shame on me."

For the repentant sinner such statements hit them like taking a snowball to the face. For those wounded by the real or perceived sins of others certain tendencies emerge.

- There is the tendency not to be satisfied with one's confession or apology.
- There is a tendency to doubt that there will ever be any real change in the offender's life.
- When we do see evidence of change we question the motive behind that change.

While we may question the motives of others in repentance, while we may make judgments about one's level of remorsefulness, and while we may think that there is nothing that can be done to truly repent, these judgments say more about us.

On one side if I focus on the sins of others, I can trick myself into thinking the things I've done or failed to do aren't so bad. "I may have slipped money out of dad's wallet but at least I didn't rob a bank."

On another side if I focus on the sins of others one can think that justice will prevail if not now, definitely when God gets a hold of them on the Day of Judgment.

Finally on the third side of the triangle if we focus on the sins of others we feel more in control of a situation and in control we make judgment on whether one has truly repented.

The weeks leading up to Holy Week and the death of Jesus on the cross will be uncomfortable reminders that we are sinners. The truth is that while your sin may be different than my sin which may be different from the sins of another, the wages of these sins is the same, Death.

Likewise, while we are called to repent of our sins let us not for one minute think that by repenting we are saving ourselves. The outward fruit of a repentant life emerges from the hidden work done on our hearts, not by ourselves, but by the one who creates

in us a clean heart and renews a right spirit within us, to use the words of David from Psalm 51.

The saving work being done in our lives is the work of Christ on the cross. A colleague of mine, Pastor Chad Bird writes, “Your sin and mine appears on the body of the man who bore that sin for you. It is peeled away from you and stuck to very soul of the one who, in your stead, bore not an ashen cross upon his forehead but a cross of wood upon his body. Christ’s cross crosses the chasm between you and God.”

The disciplines of giving, prayer and fasting are not works of repentance or evidence to point to that we are better people. These are not the things to point to in justifying the phrases “Seeing is believing” or by proving that we’ve got our life all together.

The good works that emerge come by grace as a means of God gracing your neighbor through you.

As God looks at you with mercy and steadfast love he sees on display his only beloved Son in you. Paraphrasing Romans 5:10, “You have been saved through Jesus who reconciled you to God.”

You, your brother and sister in Christ, have been adopted as children of our Heavenly Father. Let us see one another through the eyes of Christ written in Ephesians 1:4 as being “holy and blameless before him.”

The ashes remind us that we are dust and to dust you shall return. The cross reminds us that belong to Jesus and to Christ you shall return in the day of resurrection. AMEN.