

## Thought for the Day Lent 2023.2

THURSDAY 23rd FEBRUARY

Matthew 3.7-17 Fruits of Repentance



“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance.”

Matthew 3: 7-8

As Loveday reminded us yesterday Matthew’s Gospel begins with repentance - a change of mind, a change of heart, a new start. We remembered too that repentance involves not just “acting sorry” but real remorse. It involves “opening up the dustbowl of our minds to the renewing and refreshing power of God’s grace.” John the Baptist demanded of those who came flocking to him in the wilderness that they showed their repentance by the fruits of their lives. Words are never enough.

We will come later in the Gospel this Lent to Chapter 7 to a section on a tree and its fruit. Just as John encountered too many powerful people who were full of hypocrisy, so did Jesus. He said of those whom he

regarded as false prophets that we would know them by their fruits.

So it is with John. The only thing that would make him change his mind about these people would be if they really behaved differently. They came looking for baptism but going through the motions here was not enough. Real repentance meant a complete change of heart and life.

John's warnings and expectations here are stark but they set the tone for much of the story of Jesus. People needed to be ready for Jesus and we do too. The God who was coming to his people in Jesus will one day unveil his kingdom in all its glory bringing justice and joy to the whole world.

We know ourselves how much we value the people in our lives who don't just say the right words to us but who follow through with the generous actions of their lives. Productive meetings in Church don't just come up with the right statements but actions which show our commitment to the Way of Christ.

A very recent community meeting, exploring how we might better support refugees from Ukraine in and around Alderley Edge, ended with some very practical and caring responses which will make a real difference. Small actions from people working together produce fruit which builds community. And where we have not always been welcoming to those seeking asylum and

refuge we show the beginnings of our repentance in the fruit of our care and compassion.

John's expectations are only the beginning however. He is preparing the way for Jesus who comes amongst the people and asks for baptism himself. John is horrified. Why is Jesus doing this when there is no need? Jesus stands in our place as ever.

Part of the challenge of this passage in Matthew is to learn afresh to be challenged but also to be surprised by Jesus. As we and the crowd look on we hear an affirmation by God of the one whom he has sent to bring us life and hope and a rescue from our corruption. A voice from heaven is heard here in verse 17 saying, "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

I finish with a short reflection on these verses from a friend, Terry Hinks, who ministers in High Wycombe, from his book *Praying the Way*.

"Come immense, amazing God.

Come as the water of life,  
Immersing this world with your goodness,  
Turning our lives towards your kingdom,  
Our hearts and minds  
To a new way of thinking  
And a new way of being.

Come as the fire of truth,  
Exposing our presumption and complacency,  
Confronting the world's corrupt powers with your light  
And our fruitless greed with your simple grace.  
Yet in your fierce judgement,  
Do not forget your mercy.

Come as the Spirit of love,  
Freeing us from all that binds us,  
drawing us into your kingdom way,  
Showing us that we too can be your beloved sons and  
daughters,  
To walk the way of Jesus and delight your heart.”

God bless,  
Nick

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