

Lent 2021 Prospectus

Starting on Ash Wednesday we will enter a time of lament over the church's complicity in a range of issues that have been the cause of much hurt and have negatively impacted our ability to witness to a world desperately in need of Jesus.

Because the ideas of lament and repentance may be something foreign to us as a church, it is beneficial and important to understand the purpose of this week. Specifically, as we intentionally position ourselves in a posture of lament we will be moved toward the act of repentance. This is often difficult for us, both individually and communally, for two reasons. The first is because lament, or grieving, is hard and we make many attempts to avoid it. Because of that, we've not made lament a part of the discipleship process and taught what it means to grieve well. The second is because we have largely misunderstood what repentance is, again, both individually and communally.

There was a time that I assumed that repentance meant that I had to take responsibility for whatever the issue was, as if I had actually done it or participated in it. For example, the church has a long and well documented complicity in racism and racist practices. I would look at the issue and the church's involvement and assume that repentance meant that I had to admit to personal racist behavior. I would try to process that idea and really struggle with the implication that I needed to take responsibility for something I didn't actually do. I'm sure that I have situations in my life that involved unintentional actions that were, at the very least, racially insensitive. But, racist? Absolutely not. For me, the focus became about intention and I would never intentionally treat someone different because of their skin color. In my mind I couldn't align the idea of historic complicity with my own lack of personal intent.

At the same time I would struggle with the biblical principle of communal repentance, shown in Israel's repentance for previous generation's sins, even though they had not participated in that particular sin. After years of prayer, counsel, and study, I've come to understand the real intent of repentance. Before we continue, it will be helpful to define some key terms.

Complicity: the state of being an accomplice or in partnership or involvement in wrongdoing. In the context of the issues presented over the coming weeks, complicity means either intentional participation in and/or compromising in those areas by making shameful concessions.

Lament: the dictionary definition is "to feel or express sorrow or regret for something." However, it's more than that and uniquely Christian. Biblical lament is first, and foremost, a prayer. But not any prayer, it is a prayer that is directly focused on expressing fear, regret, and sorrow to God and communicating, to Him, our desire for restoration and renewal. Specifically, restoration of our connection to Him and renewal of our mind to His way of thinking.

Repentance: Again, the dictionary definition is, a deep sorrow, compunction, or contrition for a past sin, wrongdoing, or the like. However, this misses the nuances and intention of biblical repentance. Repentance is more specifically the intentional recognition of past wrongdoing, whether individual or communal, the decision to change your mind, and then act in a manner contrary to the act that prompted the need for repentance.

It is with these definitions and clarifications in mind that we are able to lament the Church's complicity and compromise of these issues. Then we are able to approach them with "a broken and humbled heart" (Psalm 51:7) and understand that repentance is not about acknowledging direct responsibility for committing them (sometimes they might be), but rather an acknowledgment of their opposition to the Gospel of Jesus and our desire to change our minds about them and commit to actions that move the church in a direction opposite of the Church's historical actions within that specific issue. In essence, it is a complete rejection of the previous intentional acts or beliefs, or passive allowance, and the deliberate move toward beliefs and actions that are Christ-honoring and people welcoming.

Before we move into repentance, we must first lament our past. Deep sorrow and grief are a necessary for repentance and the vehicle by which the Holy Spirit moves us through conviction and into repentance.

Here are the issues we lament as a church and then seek repentance in:

- **Allowing Leaders unchecked and unaccountable power/authority (WK 1)**
- **Complicity in Racial injustices (WK 2)**
- **Misplaced Allegiance (Idolatry) (WK 3)**
- **Christian Nationalism (WK 4)**
- **Enemy Making (WK 5)**

During each week (Mon – Fri) there will be daily issues presented for how these have played out in specific ways (i.e. Wk 1, Day 1 – Sexual Abuse).

Each week will feature:

- 1) A Daily Reading
- 2) A Reflective Question
- 3) A weekly prayer
- 4) A list of resources

The intention is to spend time in prayer and reflection to allow the Holy Spirit to guide you toward specific action in some or all of these areas. It's important to understand that while we can begin to move God's church away from each of these sins through individual action, we may feel God calling us to do work, on a communal scale, in one specific area. This is okay and not a rejection of the work needed in the other areas.

It's also important to remember that some of these issues may rub you the wrong way and you may want to reject the notion of complicity and the need for repentance. I urge you to still seek the Holy Spirit in these areas; remember that repentance is not an admission of responsibility for committing these sins, but a commitment and taking of responsibility to renew our mind in these areas and move the church far in the opposite direction of them.

As we enter the last week of Lent, we will enter with a heart moved toward celebration. This will be a week of preparation and celebration for the coming Good Friday and Easter. We will celebrate the resurrection and promised return of our Good King, Jesus, who has defeated every one of these sins. This week also allows us to acknowledge that Jesus's defeat of these sins is seen in our good works, He has prepared for us to do, in these areas. With that in mind, one of the primary purposes of this week is a commitment to action. Repentance is only as good as its ability to invoke action in the opposite direction of the repented of offense.

As we prepare for this next season, I'm praying for you; for us, as Jesus's Church. This is how we usher heaven to earth. Let's get to ushering.