

St. Alkmund's, Whitchurch Matthew 21:23-32

Every time we meet as Christians to worship we have time to say 'Sorry', to recognise the things that we have done wrong, the things that we have not done that we should have done, the mistakes that we have made. It is a time when we say 'Sorry', take responsibility for those things and ask God to forgive us and give us a new start.

There are many ways of using the word 'Sorry' ...

'I'm Sorry, what did you say' - 'sorry' = 'pardon' - I didn't hear.

'I'm so sorry that happened to you' - 'sorry' = expression of concern.

'Huh, Sorry' - it was really your fault not mine, or, perhaps, what are you accusing me of ...

Sing Song Sorry - wasn't really important was it.

'Well, sorry, I spoke' - you've taken what I said the wrong way.

'Sorry' - arms folded - 'I'm not sorry at all - just angry'

Sometimes when we say sorry we are actually blaming someone else - we can use the word 'Sorry' in all sorts of ways.

The 'Sorry' that really counts if we want to make a new start is one we really mean,

I am so very sorry how can I put things right?

The bible has a word for this - 'repentance'. It is a word (in the original Greek) which encompasses two different meanings: one is the sense of prostrating myself before God (or the person I have damaged or hurt) in humility; the other means turning completely around - I'm going this way and I realise it is wrong - I will turn round and go the right way.

The bible tells us that if we are really sorry - if we say it and mean it - then God will forgive us and give us a new start - a new beginning. This is what we mean when we talk about God's grace. God does not treat us as we deserve. He loves and forgives us. Christians see this as something completely amazing.

The Bible teaches us that it's not the fact that we mess up so often that matters. It is what we do about having messed up. Saying sorry and meaning it brings God's forgiveness, God's grace into our lives.

Christians believe that God will always forgive us when we say we're sorry, but in return he expects us to forgive other people's mistakes as well! None of us are perfect.

I wonder what you think might be the best way, other than by our words, to show that we are sorry. To show that God's grace and goodness, God's forgiveness has changed us? To show that the love and forgiveness shown to us by other people, has changed us?

I guess that the best way is by our actions, isn't it. By what we do.

- Perhaps as a child always left my room untidy. Saying 'Sorry' is not enough, I need to tidy my room and do my best not to make it untidy again.
- Perhaps I have thrown litter out of the car window. Being Sorry will mean that I commit myself not just to not doing it again but also perhaps to tidying litter away that can be found on Whitchurch High Street.
- Perhaps I have recognised my part in damaging our planet. Being Sorry might well include committing myself to recycle things, perhaps to limiting what I buy, perhaps choosing things which do less damage to the environment.

I am sure that there are many other possible examples.

The story Jesus tells in our Gospel reading this morning is actually a really good example. He is speaking to the religious leaders of the people of Israel, who can be seen regularly at worship, who are pious, people. Perhaps we would see them today as Christian Leaders, vicars, churchwardens, PCC members, those who are in church every Sunday. But who seemingly have not been living the rest of the week in a way that matches their words on Sunday.

Jesus tells them the story we heard about two brothers. One of whom gets his words and attitudes wrong but who eventually sees his response as poor and goes and does something about it.

The other says all the right words to his Father, but then nothing happens, nothing changes. He continues on in his own sweet way.

Jesus asks the religious people of his day which of the two brothers does their Father's will? The answer is obvious, isn't it? It is the first brother. It is the one who repented', changed his mind.

"So," says Jesus to the religious leaders and pious people of his day, "when God spoke through John the Baptist to those who were not religious, those who made big mistakes in their lives, they repented, they turned away from their way of life and they changed. But you, religious people, you heard the same message, you were given the same opportunities, but you believed that you had no need to say sorry, no need to change, you were confident in your own righteousness. And as a result, you have missed out on God's love and grace in your lives."

A salutary warning to us all here in church this morning!

Saying "Sorry" and meaning it opens us up to experience God's love, God's grace and God's forgiveness. It often also allows us to experience other people at their best as they chose to forgive us.

Reflection:

In a moment or two of silence we reflect on the truth of God's love for us. Nothing we do can separate us from God's love, God's grace.

God has promised that he will always listen to us because he loves us and wants the best for us. We are quite safe with him, and when we say sorry, which often takes courage, he will always forgive us.

Dear God,

Thank you for your promise to forgive us. Thank you that love and care for us. **Amen**