

St Stephen's, Canonbury
Lent 2016 - Challenged to Change
Lent Reflection and Study Material

Lent 3: Wake up!

Readings: Revelation 3:1-6 Matthew 23:23-28

Revelation 3:1-6

'To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Matthew 23:23-28

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

Questions

Begin by reading the 2 passages through. Is there anything that strikes you as particularly meaningful or puzzling or challenging? Just share any particular verses together or hold the words in prayer. Ask that God will help your understanding.

Often when we are on holiday we call into Churches to look around. What do you look for beyond the building and its history that might give you some clues as to the life of the church?

It was G. B. Caird, in his commentary on The Revelation of St John, who described Sardis as 'The perfect model of inoffensive Christianity.' What do you think he meant by this? If being 'inoffensive' is a negative attribute, in what way should the church be 'offensive'?

It has often been said that the Church of England is broad and shallow. Is this fair?

Jesus is calling the Christians in Sardis to be honest – this is a matter of life or death. Do you think we are able to be honest about ourselves as a church, or is there a danger that we feel we are betraying ourselves when we are.

John identified the vital 'life-signs' of growth and healing. Being honest, in your experience have you found and do you find St Stephen's to be a place of growth and healing?

Life comes through the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Talk about any experiences you have had of the touch of the Holy Spirit in your life. Can you identify growth and healing that flowed from this?

Do we need to wake up? What do you think God is saying to us today?

Prayer

Lord, wake us up,
revive us,
and fill us with your life;
In Jesus name. Amen

Family friendly version

This is for use with the Revelation reading only

Read the reading from Revelation through. Like all letters, the person who wrote it knows a lot about the people it was written to, but we don't really know what is going on in the church in Sardis. From what the letter says, what do you think their problem is?

Talk about what you think of St Stephen's. Is it exciting when you go – always, sometimes, never? What do you like best and what annoys you most?

What do you think Jesus thinks about St Stephen's? do you think he might tell us that we need to wake up sometimes? Do we sometimes seem as if we are a bit sleepy and not really excited about Jesus?

If you could change two things about St Stephen's what would they be? (You can write your ideas on the graffiti board in the church)

If you want to get up in the morning you set your alarm clock or make sure someone is going to come and wake you. God has a special way of waking us up. He can send his Holy Spirit to live inside us and give us a bit of a shake. Share anything you know about the Holy Spirit and pray that God will send his Spirit into your heart.

Prayer

Lord God,
send your Holy Spirit to wake me up!
That I may be really excited about Jesus every day. Amen