

# Lent: a Springtime for Your Soul

## Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions.

Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is always before me.

Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight;  
so you are right in your verdict  
and justified when you judge.

Surely I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother conceived me. ...

Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Open my lips, Lord,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.

A reality check! A sobering, maybe terrifying reality check. The announcement of serious illness or sudden death... or perhaps being confronted with a major flaw in my character or actions are examples. How about you? Have you had such reality checks in your life?

For David, who wrote Psalm 51, the context of writing the psalm is a sobering, terrifying reality check. Let me simply share it with you.

David is king. One day, from his roof top, he sees a beautiful woman bathing, and his lust leads him to an abuse of power and people in seducing her, and then having her loyal soldier husband killed by placing him on the front line in battle. David maybe thinks he can get away with it.

But 2 Samuel 12 gives details of the reality check. (NIV)

The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

“Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! You’re the one. This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.’”

You’re the one!

What a reality check! Have mercy, O Lord. You’ve exposed me (just as Adam and Eve felt exposed in the Garden of Eden). I’ve got nowhere to go. I am guilty. I am a sinner.

It seems to me that Ash Wednesday is such a reality check for all God’s people too: for you and me, for us. “Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” The reality check that sin brings death, and both sin and death are part of your life and mine. Lord, to whom shall we turn? You have the words of eternal life.

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according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
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Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight;  
so you are right in your verdict  
and justified when you judge.

Surely I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

And yet, the season of Lent is a springtime for the soul. This too is a reality check for us. Lent is not only a season of coming to grips with our sin, but by his Spirit God creates in us clean hearts. Lent is a time of renewal... a time of renewed focus on Jesus and his love and sacrifice for us; and that has led to Lent being a season of growth, of preparing for baptism, of preparing to go with Easter news, of renewal.

Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Open my lips, Lord,  
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So Lent has been a season associated with fasting or denying ourselves, and picking up our cross to follow Jesus. It's a time not just to give up something and to fast, but a time to take up the joy of God's salvation in a renewed springtime.

The Lenten fast is a season to focus anew... yes, remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return. But as you do, walk the journey through with Jesus to the cross. A journey of reflection, a journey of penitence; but the journey of the cross which leads to the sure place of forgiveness (remembered in the sign of the cross in the ashes tonight, and new growth through this gift).

In 2021, we are called to a new season together, to bring the message of the cross anew to the world. And in Lent, we are given the season to receive and grow in who we are. And on to the place of life restored, the place that God has in store for us. New life. A season of springtime for the soul.

What will you take up in Lent to grow in your relationship with your Saviour? What will you do to grow in your life with Christ that's new this Lent? We gather with thanksgiving tonight as Jesus gathers us in this feast of victory, life and hope. Lent reminds you and me that ashes and sackcloth and death and a return dust are reality for our mortal human life, but in Jesus these are never the final word. Rather, life — new life. Eternal life. In Christ. Grow in him this Lenten springtime. Amen.

*Video of the service including the above sermon: <https://youtu.be/bQWgfA4wG2Y>*