

'Change how you think'

A reflection for Lent



SLIDE ONE – HOLDING SLIDE

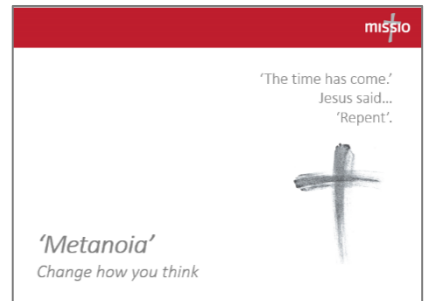
LEADER'S NOTES

Missio has a series of reflections focusing on Lenten words and themes. This reflection explores the Greek word for 'repent' – *Metanoia*– and the Lenten invitation to change how we think.



SLIDE TWO

There are some words we hear a lot of during the season of Lent. 'Repent' is one such word. It's the word used on Ash Wednesday, when ash crosses are marked on our foreheads. And it's the word Jesus cried out when he began preaching. "The time has come," He says in Mark's Gospel. "Repent!" (Adapted from Mark 1:15, NJB)



What do we think of when we hear the word 'repent'?

Suggestions might include: to be sorry, to regret, to make amends.

These are all helpful descriptions, but they don't fully explain what Jesus meant. To help us understand, it's important to know that Mark's Gospel was originally written in Greek. The Greek word Mark used for repent is *metanoia*. And the meaning of *metanoia* is to 'change how you think' or 'change your attitude'.

Perhaps when we have been asked to change our attitude, maybe by a teacher, parent, or coach, it has been given as a warning. But Jesus doesn't say it to us as a threat; rather as an invitation. Jesus encourages us, particularly in Lent, to look for ways we can change the thinking that brings us and others unhappiness—the kind of thinking that lead us to make bad choices; or that impacts on our physical and mental wellbeing.

Jesus had a great understanding of people. He realised then what psychologists recognise today - that our thoughts become our feelings, which in turn become our words and actions.

What kind of thinking might Jesus be encouraging people to change?

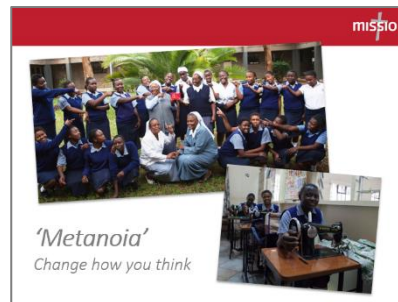
Suggestions might include: low self-worth, jealousy, prejudice, self-centredness, greed, fear.

Jesus understood that sometimes the way someone thought about themselves was caused by painful experiences that were beyond their control. Throughout his ministry, Jesus showed us how we must be patient and compassionate with such individuals and find ways to help them change for the better.

SLIDE THREE

All over the world, followers of Christ devote their lives to helping young people change their thinking, so that they are not trapped by their unhappiness but can create better futures.

In Kenya, the charity Missio helps to fund the Cardinal Maurice Otunga Centre, run by a community of religious sisters. Here, young women living in the slums and at risk of abuse or crime are offered support, education, and training for work.



One resident is 17-year-old Winifred. Winifred's dad died when she was nine and her mother is blind. To support her family, Winifred was working at the age of five. But still there wasn't enough money to get by. On one occasion Winifred didn't eat for a week. She regularly missed school as her mother couldn't pay the fees. Winifred's thinking became negative and she began to lose hope.

Thankfully Winifred was given a place at the Cardinal Maurice Centre. There she receives counselling and is learning how to change her thinking. She says: "I am trying my best to conquer all things. In my future I want to be a dressmaker. The sisters have protected me, and I want to protect other people."

Winifred reminds us that we need help to change how we think. This might be the support of:

- A teacher who encourages us to believe that we *can* learn new skills.
- A friend who encourages us to believe that we *are* good enough.
- A family member who encourages us to believe that we *do* matter.
- A counsellor who encourages us to believe in our *ability* to move forward.

In addition to the support provided by these people, we have the love of God— a love at work in all those just mentioned. God wants the best for us and is always there to listen and lift us up.

At the start of our reflection we heard Jesus' words from Mark's Gospel, saying "The time has come!" That call is for us too. Lent is the time to review our own attitudes and seek to change the ways of thinking that cause us and others unhappiness.

So, from now up to Easter, if you find yourself thinking or acting negatively towards yourself or others, challenge yourself to change. A good way to begin this change is with the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a traditional Lenten practice. Through it, an individual recognises their mistakes (e.g. losing their temper), seeks forgiveness and prays for the grace to change (e.g. to be less angry).

If you are really struggling to change your thinking, maybe you could also ask God for the courage to speak to someone who could help, like a teacher or your school chaplain.

Remember also that if we need others to help us change, then we have a responsibility to help others change too – this is what Jesus taught us. Look out for the ways you can support others; not just those close by, but also those far away, like Winifred.

Conclude with St Francis' Prayer 'Make me an instrument of your peace.' And/or the short film 'Red Box in Kenya'. This film features residents at the Cardinal Maurice Otunga Centre. View at <https://missio.org.uk/films/>