

Wednesday 18 February 2026, Ash Wednesday Choral Eucharist
The Revd Dr Evan McWilliams

What does it mean to be a Christian? The answer of the New Testament is relatively brief: to be a Christian means believing in Jesus Christ and being baptised. What makes a Christian is faith and baptism, incorporation into the visible Church.

But what does it mean to believe in Jesus? Is it enough to believe that he existed? Is it enough to believe that his teachings were wise and good? Or is there more to it? Again, the answer of the New Testament is that to believe in Jesus means to believe that God raised him from the dead, that is that he existed and exists- because he is alive- and that not only what he taught but who is comes from God.

To be a Christian then means to know something about Jesus, to give one's assent to it, and to act accordingly: know, believe, act. This three-fold process- know, believe, act- is the very essence of Christian faith. In every aspect of our faith we exercise our mind (know), our will (assent), and our affections (act). And we do this because it is impossible to know and to believe and not to act. It is impossible once we have come to know who Jesus is that we should not try to conform our will to his and live as he would have us live.

I'm going to the trouble of spelling this out on Ash Wednesday because this of all days is a time to reflect on who we claim to be and to ask ourselves whether what we claim to be can be seen by others in our lives. When we receive the cross of ash on our foreheads we hear the words, 'Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return. Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ.' We are reminded of our mortality, that we are creatures of God's making- formed in his image but not ourselves gods. We are reminded that we have fallen in to sin- not only specific individual acts, but whole patterns of thinking and living, that are not what Jesus would want them to be.

In essence, we are called to remember what it means to be a Christian. We are called to exercise our mind in remembering what Jesus has both done for us and commanded us to do. We are called to exercise our will, saying 'yes' to who he wants us to be. And we are called to exercise our affections by embracing a way of living our lives that follows the good teaching he has given us and imitates his own good character: his love, his kindness, his generosity to the most needy, his humility.

This Lent, let me encourage you to take the time to ask yourself once again, or perhaps for the first time in a long time, 'what does it mean for me to be a Christian?' And as you ponder your creatureliness, the image of God that you bear, dust though we all are, consider who Jesus is calling you to be as someone who knows, loves, and lives as someone claiming to be one of his faithful followers. Amen.