

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of January 25, 2009

Repentance: a U-turn Toward Christ (Mark 1:14-20)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 1st chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark:

“After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.’”

This is the text.

Dear friends in Christ, today's text is about a U-turn. It's about taking a turn from the steady stream of the majority and being turned against the grain of society. This text is about a new way of life. It is a call to repentance and true life in Christ.

Friends, the topic of theology is rich and complex. Theologians and pastors and lay people spend their lives studying it, learning more about the Bible, discovering new ways of applying to their lives. Bible scholars learn Greek and Hebrew. Some learn Latin, Aramaic, loads of church history and doctrine. Multitudes of books have been written, millions of pages composed all essentially to explain the mystery of God, to explain this divinely inspired Holy Book. Some theologians write in a style that can seem more complex than any portion of Scripture itself. However, the essential meaning and message of Holy Scripture is simple. The first paragraph of our text says it most clearly and simply and beautifully: “The Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel”. These are the words of Jesus. This was the message of His ministry to those who heard Him preach and saw His miracles. And this is His message to you: Repent and believe in the Gospel.

The first people Jesus called to repentance during His ministry were His disciples. We see in our text the example of Simon Peter, his brother Andrew and James and John. They were all fishermen. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew and said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” what was their response? Did they say, “I’ll think about it; I’m kind of busy with this fishing business right now. Maybe I could be a part time disciple on weekends.” No, the call to be a disciple of Jesus demanded total commitment. It was a call to a new life entirely. Instead it says, “Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.” The same was the case for James and John. It says Jesus immediately called them and they “left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed Him.”

Friends, have we forgotten what it means to be a disciple? A disciple is one who learns from the Master, who follows Him. You may do many outward good things liked by many people. But without repentance it is impossible to please God. Have we forgotten our purpose? Has the church become just another social club – an elite society that has

all the right outward forms but no inner faith and devotion? Have we forgotten what it means to repent?

You are repentant when you are sorry for your sins. This does not mean simply mouthing the words of general confession but taking them to heart. When we say we are by nature sinful and unclean it involves a desire to be clean. When we say in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" we are to come before the throne of grace in humility and throw ourselves at the mercy of God, not taking it for granted.

Psalms 51 tells us what repentance is. It says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise". In short, when we come to Christ for healing, we come acknowledging that we are broken. We don't work right and we need Him to fix us, to forgive us, and to renew us.

Friends, when our Lord says, "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand" it is not a one time event. Certainly, when you first confessed your sins and came to faith in Baptism or some time in your life that was your moment of conversion. There you passed from death to life and received the Holy Spirit and became God's child. But this call to repentance is something that goes on and on and on in the life of a Christian.

To say that we only need to repent once in life is like saying we only need one good meal and then we don't have to ever eat again. That would be absurd to say wouldn't it? It is equally absurd to be complacent in our sins and only go through the motions of confessing them. Instead, we can lay our sins naked before our Lord, not trying to hide them, especially those sins in our thoughts that no one else can see and we trust Him for mercy. Friends, the sad truth is, in mending our ways, we tend to use very thin thread. We tend to make excuses for ourselves rather than admitting our fault and coming clean and being washed in the blood of the Lamb. In Christ you are free to discard your waste basket of sins on the One who died for you and rose to give you life. He lives for You and to give you a new life to live in Him.

The Bible says we are saved by grace through faith apart from works. But do not make the mistake of thinking this means repentance is unnecessary. Repentance goes part and parcel with faith. Unless we are sorry for our sins we fail to really believe in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. You were born again in Baptism. You became a new creation. This means you have a new Master. You belong to Christ. You are His possession.

This is not a pie in the sky faith. In belonging to Christ He gives you a new life to live here and now by His grace working through you. He moves us to bear fruit from the faith that is alive in us. Friends, repentance and faith is not just head knowledge. It is living and active. It is Life living inside you. Like a bottle of champagne that is shaken up and overflows, the life of Christ overflows in His people. It is Jesus who has made His home in you and He is never idle. He bears fruit in His people. As John 15 tells us, Christ is the Vine and you are the branches. It says, if you remain in Christ you will bear much fruit. God the Father is the Gardener. He prunes every branch so that it may be

even more fruitful. The fruit of repentance comes from that U-turn we talked about earlier. Repentance is being turned in the other direction away from sin and toward Christ. It is His gift of mercy we must not take for granted.

Friends, our life in Christ does not end with the forgiveness of sins. It continues on as He renews us inside more and more each day as we grow and mature in Christ, as we spend time in Bible reading, as we receive the Lord's Supper with a repentant heart. While we surely go through ups and downs in this daily struggle, Christ is at work to make us more like Him. He leads us in His path to show the fruits of the Spirit, fruits of repentance, fruits of faith; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Friends, the word "repentance" is sometimes thought of in a negative light. It evokes fear of judgement. While sadly, those who refuse to repent will face judgement on the Last Day. This is not what God wants. As Second Peter 3 says, "he does not want anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance." He wants to save all who would be turned and in daily contrition, believe in Christ. The word "repentance" is really a call to Christ. It's a call out of darkness and into His marvellous light. It is a call to the shelter of our Saviour, to redemption and eternal life. The disciples were excited by this call. They left everything to follow Him immediately. They saw Jesus as the Christ and Son of God and way of eternal life. It was not a burden but a great delight.

In being called and turning to Him they found forgiveness; they found the kingdom of heaven itself. Jesus says, "Repent and believe the Gospel". Gospel is a sweet word. It means "Good News". The Good News of Jesus our Saviour brings healing, refreshment, restoration; it revives the soul, and gives life eternal. Turning to Him each day is the best U-turn you will ever make. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.