

Repent and Sin No More

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...

You may have heard the one about the sneaky house painter who would thin his paint so it would go further... and by doing this he was able to come in as the lowest bidder for most jobs (which is how he got the job painting a beautiful little church across town)... And as always, he thinned his paint way down with turpentine....

Well, one day while he was up on the ladder -- the job almost finished -- he heard a horrendous clap of thunder, and the sky opened...

The downpour washed the thinned paint off the church and knocked the painter off his ladder (and into puddles of thinned and worthless paint)...

The man knew that it was a warning from the Almighty, so he got on his knees and cried: "Oh, God! Forgive me! What should I do?"

And from the thunder, a mighty voice was heard: "REPAINT! REPAINT! AND THIN NO MORE!"

In our Gospel lesson this morning we find ourselves reading the first 9 verses of the Gospel of Mark... and, of course, the first verse tells us that Jesus Christ is the Son of God – but then it quickly reveals the second primary teaching of the Christian faith – that if you want to have a relationship with the Son of God – which brings about the forgiveness of sins and opens up the path of Everlasting Life - (the Bible tells us that John the Baptist proclaimed a message of repentance)...
to repent, repent, and sin no more...

That same message was later taught by Jesus himself (where it tells us in Matthew 4:17, "*Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near"*... and, as you know, it was the same message that the disciples preached as well... in fact, it tells us in Mark 6:12, "*They went out and preached that people should repent*"...

Now the New Testament (as you know) was written in Greek (and so – with the exception of a few verses here and there – all the teachings of Jesus are made known to us in the Greek language)... and the Greek word for 'repentance' is *Metanoia*... and what's interesting about the word 'metanoia' (when we translate it to mean 'repentance') is that to repent means more than saying sorry... to repent (at least the way that it's described in the New Testament means "to turn in a new direction"... or "to turn around")... to turn back to God...

And when John the Baptist proclaimed a message of repentance to the people who came to hear him preach – he was telling them that if they wanted to know the peace of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that NOW was the time to turn away from sin (and turn towards God) – because only God can breathe new life into us (not only in this world – but in the world to come) ...

You know, it's been my experience through the years that some people either don't see a need to repent... and it's simply because they don't see themselves as sinful... and sure, they may cheat a bit on their taxes – or steal a cookie every now and again – but in their eyes in comparison to 'most people' (they're okay)... completely ignoring the verse found in 1 John 1:8 where it says, "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*"... and the sin that the author is referring to is the focus on OUR needs, OUR suffering, OUR wants, OUR desires – with absolutely no care in the world for the suffering and needs of others... at least, nothing's done about it...

Or, if they're not denying a need to repent (others believe that change is impossible, or they're afraid to admit that they're wrong, or they can't swallow their pride – or they can't envision what it would look like to turn their life over to God - and so they never try)... and because they refuse to repent (they find continued suffering in their life)... the suffering that sin causes all of us (when we are in a broken relationship with our God...

Years ago I remember listening to a pastor named Gene Appel (who led a big church in Arizona before becoming an assistant pastor at Willowcreek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois)...

and in his teaching he was the first preacher that I heard who also acknowledged the truth of repentance... that you can't just mouth the words, "I repent" – and hope that something magical happens) – but that repentance requires personal commitment, daily struggle perhaps, and certainly the Grace of God to see us through... and if you think you can just sit back and relax while God does all the work you might be missing the point... to repent is to move in a new direction (that includes change and God's Grace - to shape you)... it's a commitment that some like to describe as 'one day at a time'... we keep coming back to the Lord...

And Pastor Appel tells the story of a small lake that he loved to take his family to every summer in a secluded area of Northern Minnesota... it's so beautiful that he often says that you can only appreciate it by seeing it for yourself...

And to get to this lake you have to be very determined... in fact, after launching the boat from a connecting lake he works his way through a winding channel (about the length of two football fields)... the pathway is about 6 feet wide and is filled with many lily pads which brush up against the boat, as a wall of tall white birch trees drop their branches low enough to touch the tops of their heads in the boat... sometimes leaving scratches and bruises on them...

At one point the water gets so shallow in the channel that the motor has to be raised and they have to paddle out for a bit... for the last fifty feet, the bottom of the boat starts dragging on the channel bed... and finally before they are safely on land (his wife and kids get out of the boat and pull him through)...

As you can imagine, getting this far is quite an ordeal, but the end of the narrow, shallow channel opens up to the most peaceful lake you can imagine... in fact, the way he describes it you will see some of the most beautiful sunsets imaginable, eagles soaring overhead, deer drinking at the water's edge – imagine these things and you might just get a sense of the lake's natural beauty...

and what's even better is that there are very few people on that island (and the reason being is that it takes so much effort to get there that few people are willing to do the work)...

And the reason why he tells this story is to illustrate what the Bible truly means by repentance... to truly repent means more than mouthing the words, "I'm sorry"... but instead, to repent means that we take the harder road and we make the necessary steps at changing our lives for the better (with God as our pilot)...

And then Pastor Appel would say, "because what is ultimately waiting for us on the other side of repentance (is something so beautiful and wonderful) that you can only appreciate it (by going there yourself)..."

You know, you're listening to this message today for a reason (because God wants to speak to your heart) and I realize that if you're not ready to move in a new direction there's nothing I can say or anyone else can say to change your heart ...

But if you are listening (and you're tired of suffering) – and carrying that burden of guilt and shame – and you're ready to replace the pain of the past (with hope for today) – the Bible tells us that the path in getting there (is through repentance) – by turning away from the empty promises of sin (and turning towards Jesus)... and having faith that he will give you all that you need (to live in the Spirit of His Grace)...

Well, someone is probably saying to themselves “*but pastor you make it sound so easy... I’ve tried many times to turn my life around and I don’t think I can do it*”...

And no, I never said it was easy (but what I do believe is that through the Grace and love of God every person (who comes to Jesus in repentance can become more Christ-like (or as it says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “*Anyone who is in Christ becomes a ‘new creation’*”) by keeping true to one simple virtue... a virtue I’d like to leave you with (through the telling of a very simple and short story)...

It’s a story once told by a Jewish rabbi who wanted to teach his own students how to live a life of repentance (and become that new person)... and as the story begins he tells of a man who was definitely going down the wrong road... in fact, the man was a thief, and a gossip, and was committing all kinds of sins that would make most of us blush...

Finally tired of living that kind of a life (and desperate to change) the man found a wise man and broke down crying, saying, “*Please sir, help me! How can I find a better life than I am living now*”...

To which the wise man said, “***To your own self be true***”...

Friends, this Advent season (as we await the coming of the Christ Child) make it your own prayer to meet Jesus anew (in these difficult days by turning back to God) – and to find that peace – that only He can promise... and to your own self – be true...

May God bless you and keep you – and may our Lord keep your eyes on Him – now and forever...

In Jesus’ name we pray...

Amen!...

