

“Core Training for the Disciple: Turn (Repent)”

Luke 13:1-9

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Repentance... This is one of those familiar Christian words, often spoken by the so-called fanatic, fire-and-brimstone preachers on T.V., who try to literally, “scare the hell out of you,” so you qualify for heaven. Repentance.... Who wants to talk about such a subject? Even some recent surveys of Christians seem to indicate that there’s really no need to repent, for we are all basically good anyway. Therefore, the subject of repentance and even the word repent are rendered “relics of the past, obsolete, meaningless.” After all, “I’m OK and your OK.” Who needs repentance?!

Jesus in our Gospel reading today makes it clear that repentance is indeed relevant and necessary; repentance is not an option. Both Paul and Jesus say that right now, today is the time to repent. Repentance is not a back-burner matter, which I’ll get to eventually only after I’ve done everything else. No! Rather, it’s an urgent matter, which I need to attend to right now, today. Martin Luther had it right when he said that every day is a day of repentance.

Matthew 3:2 – John the Baptist – “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

Luke 13:5 – Jesus – “But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

The word for repentance here is met-ah-neh-oh – to repent, from the word met-ah-noi-ah – repentance, a change of mind and heart – in other words, a turning.

Wabush, a town in a remote portion of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, was completely isolated for some time. But, in recent years a road was cut through the wilderness to reach it. Wabush now has one road leading into it, and thus, only one road leading out. If someone would travel the unpaved road for six to eight hours to get into Wabush, there is only way he or she could leave---by turning around, taking a U-turn and heading the other direction.

Each of us, by birth, arrives in a town called Sin. As in Wabush, there is only one way out--a road built by God himself. But in order to take that road, one must first be turned around. That complete about face is what the Bible calls repentance, and without it, there's no way out of town – we continue to live in sin.

In repentance, we turn or change directions in 3 ways:

First, we turn from independence to dependence! Every single one of us have “sinned and come short of the glory of God.” What’s the one sin we feel so desperately bad about, that one sin that we can’t even admit that we’ve committed, that one sin that we

cannot bring out of the darkness into God's marvelous light in order for Him to forgive it, that one sin that brings us guilt and shame day in and day out?

We all have one, and until we are ready and willing to release that sin to Him we are saying we are independent of Him and really don't need Him in our lives. At some point in time we have to come to the place where we admit that we have failed; and, that we need God to forgive us and take control. Until we are able to admit that God has not been first place in our lives, we will not be able to go down the road of healing and forgiveness. Today, Jesus says to us, "Repent and turn towards Me."

Acts 2:38 - And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

And this turning we call repentance, it is not something we just do once a year during Lent or once month and not even just once a week as we worship. It is to be daily; being in a constant state of repentance towards God. Martin Luther says in his Small Catechism, "The Old Adam is to be drowned by daily contrition (sorrow for our sins) and repentance (turning towards God in faith), by which we resist and overcome desires. The new man then emerges and arises as we daily live and grow before God in true faith and good works." **(Song – God loves the broken man – So we hit our knees and lift a prayer asking for mercy and grace – then, we do our best led by the Spirit to live as that new man growing in Him in faith.)**

This leads to the second turning, from living for self to living for Jesus! Now that we have realized that we are headed in the wrong direction, it is time to turn around on life's highway and live for Jesus, versus living just for ourselves. We live in obedience to God because of His grace and mercy in Jesus (Gospel story). Lutheran teaching: Justification – Sanctification.

Romans 6:11 – "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Turned from sinner to saint because of Jesus. We have received the "righteousness of God."

Not too many years ago newspapers carried the story of Al Johnson, a Kansas man who came to faith in Jesus Christ. What made his story remarkable was not his conversion, but the fact that as a result of his newfound faith in Christ, he confessed to a bank robbery he had participated in when he was nineteen years old. Because the statute of limitations on the case had run out, Johnson could not be prosecuted for the offense. Still, he believed his relationship with Christ demanded a confession. And he even voluntarily repaid his share of the stolen money. "Consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus"

The final turning is from separation to salvation. We can choose to keep going in the direction we are headed and not make the U-turn that God requires. God gives us the ability and the choice to turn toward Him at His invitation or to turn away from Him! Which choice have you made? Have you made that “U-turn” in your life yet?

Jesus said, “But unless you repent, you too will all perish.” There it is – NO glossing over it – NO airbrushing the details – NO looking the other way – NO brushing past it. We can choose the “primrose path” which only leads to separation from God, OR we can turn towards Jesus and receive salvation – the pathway to rejoicing forevermore!

Jesus invites us to make the most of our time, which God has given us. Every day is a gift of God. We don’t know when our time on this earth will end, and we’ll meet our Maker. Our lives are in constant and daily need of re-turning to the Lord—for that is the literal meaning of the word repent. Some days, our sin makes it necessary for us to turn 180 degrees in the opposite direction from the way in which we’re going, if we are going to re-turn to God.

May this Lenten season be a time for us to re-turn to the Lord; to confess our sins; to forgive one another and be reconciled with one another. For our Lord is a God of grace; “He will abundantly pardon.” Repenting, returning to the Lord is God’s gift of grace offered to you every day. May each day be one of thanking God for all of the opportunities we’ve been given to love and serve our Savior and each other. In Jesus, Amen.