

Lenten Repentance

(Sermon Theme by Rev. Garth Wehrfritz-Hanson)

Scripture: Luke 13: 1-9

Reflection: When you hear the word Repentance, what do you think of? As Christians we have heard this word many times from the Bible readings. We read about the word repentance every time we read the story of John the Baptist. The introduction of adult John the Baptist in the Gospels is him calling the people to the river Jordan to be baptized in repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He called them all to repentance, to turn back from all the things they were doing which hampered their relationship with God.

The word repent is one of those familiar Christian words, often spoken by fundamentalist Christians, the fire-and-brimstone preachers on T.V., who try to literally, “scare the hell out of you,” so you be qualified to enter into 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.”

However, both the prophet in our first lesson, and Luke in our gospel today beg to differ! The prophet, writing to the exiled Jews in Babylonia and Jesus in our gospel; both insist that repentance is indeed relevant and necessary; repentance is not an option.

Both the prophet 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.

One of the major weaknesses of us flawed human beings is that we love to live in denial; we are experts at the art of procrastination; we can put-off that which is unpleasant with the hope that it will look after itself or just go away if we delay it long enough.

Our first lesson and our gospel today both tell us that we cannot procrastinate, we cannot put on the back-burner what needs doing today. The prophet says: “Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

Jesus, in answering the question about whether the Galileans killed by Pilate while they offered their sacrifices in the temple; or whether the 18 killed by the falling tower of Siloam got what they deserved because they were worse sinners than other folks;

Jesus says: “No way!” God doesn’t work that way. He then goes on to tell them to look at themselves and their own lives, rather than the lives of others, he says: “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.” The parable of the barren fig tree is but a reiteration of this same point.

After three years of not bearing fruit, the gardener appeals for a second chance, by giving the tree one more year to bear fruit, after which if it fails to bear fruit, then it can be cut down.

Our lives are like that fig tree; God gives us only a certain amount of time to live on this earth. We don’t know when we are going to die. Therefore, we are given the opportunity right now, today, every day, to repent—to make peace with our God and one another and be prepared to meet our Maker, if our time is now.

The following story, by writer Andrew Greeley, illustrates quite well, how important it is for us to do what needs doing right now, rather than procrastinating:

Once there was a couple who won a great prize, a two week trip to Ireland. They had a whole year to make the trip. Well, said the wife, “Let’s not do it this summer, because we don’t want to interfere with our summer at the lake. And we can’t go in September because that’s when the kids go back to school.”

Then it came to be late October, before anyone knew it, and the husband said, “Well we can’t go over the holidays.” “That’s right,” his wife agreed. “Let’s wait till after the first of the year.” However, someone told them that the days were terrible short in Ireland in January and February and besides the weather wasn’t very good.

So they said, “Well, let’s wait till spring when we know there’ll be good weather and we don’t have to worry about the snow closing airports in this country.” So finally they made reservations for the first week in May. The weather was supposed to be good in Ireland and the days were long and it was the best time in the year to go.

They admitted that they were cutting it close because their prize ran out on June 1, but they were sure nothing would go wrong. Then the husband had a gallbladder attack and required surgery. The doctors said he would be able to travel, oh, by the middle of June. So this poor couple missed their trip of a lifetime!

Lent is a good time to act on the urgency of repentance. Now, today is the time to do what needs doing, rather than putting it off or hoping, falsely that it will go away or look

after itself. Seize the opportunity, “seize the day,” while it presents itself; otherwise it may never be there for you again.

We are not God; we are given only a certain amount of time to act now. Some opportunities in life run out for us. We could be here today and gone tomorrow.

Yet, in our human state, we often deny this truth. We say to ourselves, to others and to God, things like: “I’ve got to get everything in my life in order before I can start going to church and becoming involved. When I get the promotion at work, then I can go to fewer meetings and spend more time with my spouse and children.

I don’t have to study for that exam until the night before. I can put-off visiting my parents and grandparents until next summer. I want to start exercising but I am waiting until I can afford those fancy walking shoes.

Tomorrow I’ll quit smoking and drinking, after all, I can quit any time. There’s lots of time for me to get involved in the church; right now I’ve got to work on Sundays to make a decent living and keep my job. When I retire there’ll be plenty of time and opportunities to serve God and the church. This list goes on and on doesn’t it?

What do I need to repent of? I live a good life, look after my family, pay taxes, and stay out of trouble. I’m going to hold a grudge against so-and-so because they don’t deserve my forgiveness. Let them come to me and beg my forgiveness. I’m never going to speak to them again!” Don’t these comments sound familiar?

The prophet in our first lesson and Jesus in our gospel invite 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 need of returning to the Lord—for that is the literal meaning of the word repent. Some days, our actions make 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 return to God.

This is a perfect opportunity for us all. If you think that there are things that you need to let go of, people who you need to apologize to, practices that you need to take up, this is the time. And sometimes we are oblivious. Sometimes we don’t realize the pain we’ve caused or we’re causing others. Sometimes we think our acts are righteous or we’re doing them for the right reasons. Lent is a time for us to bare ourselves to God, to ask God for illumination so that we may see the damage we’re inflicting on others and perhaps our own selves. This is the time my Friends.

May this Lenten season be a time for us to return 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.” repentance is God’s gift of grace offered to us every day. May each day be one of thanking God for all of the opportunities we’ve been given to love and serve our Maker and each other. Amen..