

By Repentance

Advent Midweek #3 – 12/14/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Matthew 3:1-3, Mk. 1:14-15 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 2, [John preached,] **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”**.

Introduction

- ✘ As our celebration of Jesus’ birth draws ever-closer, dear Christians, make plans to prepare. Why? because we have this from His very own mouth in John 14:6, “I am the way...no one comes to the Father except through Me.”
 - ➔ At Christmas we praise God, who out of love has provided that Way into His eternal kingdom. And He prepared for that Gift by many promises.
- ✘ So to be ready to celebrate His birth we heed Amos’ word (4:12) to God’s people who must meet Him in punishment for sin. He said, “...prepare to meet your God, O Israel!”
 - ➔ So we prepare spiritually, looking at our own spirit in the light of God’s Word. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would bring to mind for us what God said and taught. So it is by hearing, believing, obeying His Word we become ready. And of all of His many words none is more striking and important to our preparation than this, “Repent!”

I. Importance of Repentance

- ✘ John preached repentance before Jesus came to him for baptism. Verse two tells us that John said to the crowds who came to him, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”. After John was imprisoned Jesus picked up the Gospel baton and proclaimed, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mk. 1:15). Jesus even tells us that angels rejoice over sinners who repent (Lk. 15:10).
 - ➔ When Joseph was told by the angel Gabriel that Mary was to have a child, he said, “...you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Mat. 1:21), because it was our sin that brought Jesus to earth; the sin of all mankind for which He made payment with His life.
- ✘ In Jeremiah 31:18-19, we hear Ephraim grieving before God, “You have disciplined me, and I was disciplined, like an untrained calf; bring me back that I may be restored, for You are the LORD my God. For after I had turned away, I relented, and after I was instructed, I struck my thigh; I was ashamed, and I was confounded, because I bore the disgrace of my youth”.
 - ➔ Did you catch there the value of Ephraim’s repentance? It was only after God’s punishment and instruction that Ephraim recognized his wrong, and turned away from sin, back to God. God’s rebuke helped him, just as God’s Law does in showing all of us God’s wrath against sin. None of us likes to be shown that we are wrong, but when we are unwilling to acknowledge our sin, then we need the truth to convict us and call us to repentance, so that we might be restored with God.
 - ➔ You see, that’s what the word repentance literally means. In Greek it is “metanoia”, which means to “turn around” or “change”. Christ is the one who not only calls us to repent, but also gives us the ability to do so by His powerful grace.
- ✘ Godly repentance then begins with inner grief; regret over breaking God’s Commandments. This grief, when accompanied by faith, realizes that it is “my guilt” that caused the Son of God to suffer and die a shameful death to pay for “my wrong-doing”.

- This grief also recognizes that I have not only hurt God, but in my sin, I have hurt and offended my neighbor as well, whether it is my family or co-worker or friend or someone I only just now met for the first time. And don't forget the pain and suffering that my sin brings upon myself as well when I have displayed envy, hatred, selfishness, and evil desires that I can't control.
- ✘ Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death". That's earthly death, spiritual death and eternal death – all three. This is how serious our sin and our lack of repentance is. God says that unless we repent we shall perish; we actually put our salvation at risk.
 - The most dangerous thing is when any of us might imagine that we are OK and not as bad as those "other" people; when we live in the deception of thinking that since we escaped punishment, God doesn't think our sin is "that bad".
- ✘ In Luke, chapter 13, a report came to Jesus that a building had collapsed and some tenants were killed. Did they deserve that stroke of "bad luck" more than others because they were somehow worse sinners? Or did the sin lie with the builder who used shoddy materials? Or with the workmen who did a poor job? Or with the building inspector who was careless or corrupt? Who deserved destruction? Jesus said, "I tell you ... unless you repent, you will all likewise perish".
 - The fact that people refuse to repent bothers the Lord so much that 2 Peter 3:9 says it causes the delay of Jesus' promised return. "The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness," Peter says, "but is patient...not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance".
- ✘ So what is it that keeps so many of us from repentance? Often it's because we're convinced that we have not done anything wrong. Instead, "they are the ones who need to repent, not me". Many think repentance is not necessary for "every day" sin, but only for thieves in prison or on a cross. Still God warns us to be prepared for His coming, so that we will not be found lacking in repentance and faith. He's not playing games with us. It is a serious matter.
- ✘ In his speech outside of Athens, Paul talked to the leading philosophers – those whom we would call agnostics today, who do not know whether or not there is a God. Paul said that often in the past God ignored and passed by false worship, indifference, apathy, but now since God came in the flesh, everything has changed. He said in Acts 17:30-31, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world...". Judgment is coming. The King is at the gate!
 - So dear Christian, you and I cannot safely say, "I'll wait until tomorrow to repent".

II. Proclaimers of Repentance

- ✘ Even though it was not popular in Bible times, just as it remains unpopular in our culture today, the message and call to repentance runs throughout all of Holy Scripture.
 - John the Baptizer said in verse two of our Gospel Reading, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat. 3:2). And then Matthew quotes the theme for our entire sermon series from Isaiah 40:3, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight'."
- ✘ As the one sheep in the cartoon on the back of your bulletin tonight indicates, most people assume that the wilderness is a place where action was not expected; only a place we should want to get away from. But this is where God says that all of the action actually takes place.
 - It's more than just a haunt of evil spirits or where evil lurks. It is where God loved and fed His people with manna for 40 years and with His laws (Ex. 16, 20; Matt. 14:13-21), for as Jesus said

when the devil tempted Him in the wilderness, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Mat. 4:4).

→ It’s in the wilderness that God made the covenant with His people (Ex. 24) even while they tested Him throughout their journey to The Promised Land (Ps. 95:8-11). Jesus was baptized in the wilderness and it’s where Jesus went to pray to the Father (Lk.5:16) as well as the place where He was served by angels (Mat. 4:11).

→ In one of His parables Jesus found the one lost sheep and pastured His 99 (Lk 15:4) in the wilderness. God led His people into the wilderness, through the wilderness and out of the wilderness into The Promised Land.

→ As an illustration of His love for us all Hosea portrays God as taking His beloved there to woo her: “I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her” (Hos. 2:14).

✘ So, it is in your wilderness and mine where God speaks and calls to us. It is where we are confronted with hunger and temptation, loneliness and fear; where our spirits are tested and we want to change our minds and lives to be in tune with His life.

→ No wonder it’s in the wilderness that John calls us to “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”, for it’s in our wilderness that we see our need for God; for our Savior.

✘ In Matthew 3:8 John directs us to “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance” – not only to turn from sin and turn to the Lord, but to let God’s change in repentance actually bring change into our lives. This is where sorrow for adultery; for stealing; for misusing God’s name and worshipping the things of this world before our Father leads us to live, speak and think in purity and prayer and praise to Him alone.

✘ Jesus spoke the same message that He gave John and the prophets, saying in Mark 1:15, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel”. Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus directed the disciples, “that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in [My] name to all nations” (Lk. 24:47).

✘ And as Peter was tried before the chief council of Israel because he confessed Jesus as Messiah he declared the true nature of repentance as a gift of God’s grace. He said, “God exalted [Jesus] at His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).

→ You see, repentance for Peter was God’s highest gift because it enabled people to know God more clearly; to follow Him more nearly.

→ And you can’t overlook Peter’s Pentecost sermon where Acts 2:37-39 tells us, “Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ 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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.’”

✘ Not to be left out, Paul’s message likewise taught the necessity and grace of an attitude of repentance. Paul told Agrippa that wherever he preached – at Damascus, Jerusalem, or in all Judea – it was so that Jew and Gentile “should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance” (Acts 26:19-20).

→ He also reminded the pastors of Ephesus in Acts 20:20-21, “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ”.

Conclusion

- ⌘ So, our Lord's teaching, like the apostles' and baptizer's, linked repentance and forgiveness and faith together in the one saving Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - ➔ Repentance leads to Jesus Christ who alone is "The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29). It is only through Him that the world is reconciled to God. He is "the (only) Way" to the Father (Jn. 14:6).
 - ➔ And that way is prepared in the grace of our baptism by repentance as our old Adam is drowned daily with all of its evil lusts and desires.
- ⌘ Thus by God's gift of repentance He helps us change our mind about loving what is evil, so that we come to actually despise it; forever praising the God who frees us from guilt and shame; judgment and wrath, by the sacrifice of His Son who came as promised into our flesh; still comes in His Word and Sacrament and will come again to bring us into His eternal glory. Amen.