

“Wait In Wonder...Radical 180”



Second Sunday Of Advent

Saturday & Sunday, December 7 & 8, 2019
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

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

First lines are really important. First lines set the stage for everything that is to follow. For example, in the book *Moby Dick* it begins with “Call me Ishmael”, and then we begin to hear the first person narrative of the fight with the great white whale, or in movies, “In a galaxy, far, far, away”...*Star Wars!* Or in speeches, a speech actually that was done on this same date a number of years ago, December 7, 1941, “A date which will live in infamy”, and in the Bible, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth.”

So, imagine my first words to you this Sunday morning are “All right, you heathens, listen up!”

First words, John the Baptist, who was preaching to a mix of everyday spiritual seekers, conservative religious laity called Pharisees, and professional clergy called Sadducees, began his sermon to them “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

The word repent has a lot of first in the Bible.

- Of course, it's the first words of John the Baptist's sermon.
- *Repent* is also the first word in Jesus' gospel in both Matthew and Mark.
- *Repent* is the first of the preaching ministry of the twelve disciples (Mark 6:12).
- *Repent* is the first word in the preaching instructions of Jesus that he gives to his disciples after his resurrection (Luke 24:46-47). Indeed, that has become the mission of the church throughout the centuries, to go to all nations and to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins.
- *Repent* is the first word that Peter tells the new followers of Jesus of what they were to do after Peter gives the very first Christian sermon (Acts 2:38).

“Repent” comes from the Greek word *metanoia*, which means “turning”, or “coming back”, or today we might say “Shape up”, “Get it together”, “move!”

It is an urgent message, ***Repent for the kingdom of God has come near!*** John is convinced that Jesus' kingdom is close. God in all his goodness is here to share with us his mercy and love. His king is coming. But do we act like it?

After all, we often put things more important than we do God. We **love** things more than God. We **live** for things other than God. By not putting God at the center, we **dishonor** God, who created us. And then we wonder why we're unhappy, why are we

unconnected, why are we suffocating? That brokenness and disconnect that we feel is called sin and ultimately it will kill us.

And so, John declares "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!" NOW! What are you waiting for? So, get about the things of God. Completely reorient yourself, do a radical 180. Make God the center of your life.

Stop making excuses, worship him in praise and thanksgiving. Stop playing it safe, get out there and serve God and neighbor. Do you want to know God better, join with people to learn and to grow? Prepare yourself. Get spiritually ready for the King who is coming, and it all begins with the word "repent."

The word comes to us both as a **Command** to "Do this" but also as an **invitation** to "Become this".

So, first, **Recognize your imperfection and your need for repentance.** Genuine repentance begins with a clear understanding of the wrong we have committed, of the disconnect that we feel. What have you contributed to the brokenness that you feel? The remedy for sin is admitting to it, rather than just being obstinate, or denying it or reasoning it away.

The Psalmist in Psalm 51 says, "For I know my transgression, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight."

We are not perfect and so we need that 180. We need a Savior.

So secondly, **Seek God.** Open yourself up to a new desire for God. Open yourself up to receive the hope and the forgiveness and the mercy and the love that he wants to share upon you.

St. Augustine said, "To fall in love with God is the greatest romance; to seek him the greatest adventure; to find him, the greatest human achievement."

The good news is that Jesus came to break our bondage and to give us life.

Did you notice, what was the first thing people did when they heard John's message? When they recognized that they were captive to sin. They confessed their sin. That is not easy. It is incredibly hard, it's painful to admit when we're wrong. It's painful to admit our short comings and sins and entrust ourselves to a loving God.

For John, change is a great thing that people must do. Repent he says or continue to experience that separation from creator and creation. These are harsh words to our ears.

But John also offers a way to turn, a direction in which we can go. He calls people to a baptism of repentance. Now repentance is signaled by a **new desire for** and **experience of** the presence of God.

Fourth, the people who came to be baptized by John were warned, "**Bear fruit worthy of repentance.**" This is a call to change, to do something different. If you find yourself being angry all the time, try to smile a little bit; if you're stingy or holding back, give and be generous. If you gossip and talk about people behind their back, just stop it, it's ugly!

In Christ, we are always in a process of becoming and we have been invited into a new kingdom, a new way of living, a new life.

And Isaiah paints a beautiful wonderful picture of what that is like. It's a place of righteousness, of peace, of loving community where wolf and lamb, leopard and kid, calf and lion, cow, bear, child, and poisonous snakes are all living together in harmony and the spiritual gift of God.

Jesus frequently paints this gracious goodness of God as the reason for repentance. And the invitation into a community of grace given to us by God. Notice that Jesus is often hanging out with tax collectors and sinners and those considered not worthy.

Jesus says there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents when you and I turn around. God's merciful forgiveness is for all people and for all of our pride and denials and sins, God offers us the gift of Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

And finally, just **repeat** it all. No, we're not perfect people, we need a savior. And sometimes even our repentance is not perfect, and so we come again and again asking for forgiveness for the same things.

Martin Luther said, "*We need to hear the Gospel every day, because we forget it every day.*" And with repentance and confession comes more trust and spiritual peace and good fruit of trusting God, doing the right things and living in his kingdom.

And so, my last words to you are: "All right, you heathens, listen up...Repent, the kingdom of heaven has come near." Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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