

## Pentecost 6 / July 4, 2021

### Mark 6:12

***“So, they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.”***

In Mark's gospel, Jesus' begins His public ministry saying, “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel.*” In our gospel this morning Jesus sends His twelve closest disciples to extend His ministry throughout Galilee, proclaiming that people should repent. If you were asked to explain what it means to repent, what would you say? If you asked someone to repent, what would you expect them to do? Typically, we understand repentance to refer to a change in behaviour. If we asked someone to repent, we would want them to stop doing something we found offensive and start doing things we found pleasing. Repentance in the prophetic tradition generally involved Israel ceasing to worship idols and false gods and worshipping the Lord as their only God and Saviour.

Repentance does involve a change in behaviour, but it begins with a change in attitude, which comes from a changed relationship with God. Repentance begins with faith in God as He reveals Himself in Jesus Christ. Repentance is faith in Christ as Saviour, because Jesus brings us into relationship with God in peace. Repentance is not us changing ourselves, or our relationship with God. Repentance is Christ changing us through the gospel of forgiveness, in the renewal of our spirits through faith in Him and baptism into His death and resurrection. Repentance is the Holy Spirit empowering us to walk in the newness of life, according to God's righteousness revealed in the law. But repentance begins with the Holy Spirit in our hearts inspiring us to faith in Christ as Saviour. Repentance is to believe in Christ and to be renewed in our whole spirit, body and soul, by the power of His love.

Repentance is to come to know God as loving Father for the sake of Christ. Repentance is knowing God as loving Father in the forgiveness Jesus earned for us and everyone on the cross, which we appropriate to ourselves through faith in Him as Saviour. The first repentance is conversion, in which the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and convinces us Christ is our Saviour. The most stunning example of this first work of the Holy Spirit was on the day of Pentecost, when three thousand confessed their sin of crucifying Christ and then confessed their faith in Him as Saviour and received baptism in His name. The Holy Spirit brings us to repentance through the word. Jesus sent the twelve disciples to share in the first work of repentance, by calling people to faith in Him as Saviour. They would call people to repent, by proclaiming Him as the Messiah. They would call people to put their faith in Him as their Saviour. They would call people to faith by proclaiming the gospel of forgiveness, but the Holy Spirit would do the rest. Repentance is first and foremost the work of the Holy Spirit, who opens our ears to hear the gospel of forgiveness and opens our hearts to receive Christ as our Saviour.

Having brought us to faith and renovated our relationship with the heavenly Father, the Holy Spirit begins to renovate our lives in keeping with what we consider to be repentance, by changing our actions and our attitudes. The Holy Spirit creates in us a desire to worship God. King David sang, “*I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord.’*” When the Thessalonians came to faith, St. Paul rejoiced that they turned from things they had falsely worshipped as gods, “*to serve the living and true God.*” You might think that is a no brainer, but the old idolatry clings to our spirits even after we have come to know the true God and the truth of His love in Jesus Christ.

It is our fallen nature to make gods out of created things; money, people, power, pride. The temptation of the devil at the beginning of creation was for the woman and the man to become gods themselves. Long after God had made Israel His people, empowered and taught them to worship Him in Spirit and in truth, Joshua still found it necessary to admonish them to “*put away the foreign gods that are among you and incline your heart to the Lord, the God of Israel.*” Repentance takes many forms in our lives as believers, but the first form of repentance is that we would consciously seek out and set aside every idol form in our hearts and intentionally worship God, whom we have come to know in Jesus Christ.

The kingdom of God is His righteous reign in the world, which begins with His reign in individual lives through faith in Jesus as our Saviour. God expresses His righteous reign in our lives, by calling us to walk according to His righteousness, as expressed in His word in general and in His holy law in particular. In the book of proverbs it says, “*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.*” One age's good idea is another age's abomination. We see that every day in the world. Jesus once warned Peter that he was thinking contrary to the thoughts of God and that what he thought was common sense and a no brainer, was in

fact the work of the devil. God told Isaiah, “*My thoughts are not your thoughts and my ways are not your ways.*” Repentance is to consider the thoughts of God as we discern His will in our lives.

Repentance is to order our lives according to God’s righteous ways and not according to the ways of the world. Repentance is to conform our thoughts to the thoughts of God and not according to the thinking of the world, whose thoughts change over time and vary from place to place at any given time. In his first letter St. John wrote, “*Do not love the world or the things in the world...the world is passing away along with its desire, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*” We live in repentance, by learning the Lord’s will and seeking His Spirit to empower us to live as children of His kingdom. We learn the Lord’s will by becoming acquainted with the sacred writings, knowledgeable as to their contents and understanding their meaning. In scripture God reveals His thoughts and expresses His will for our lives.

The psalmist rejoiced in the revelation and guidance God gives in the scriptures. He sang, “*Your word O Lord is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.*” The creation bears witness to the glory of the Lord, but God gives His greatest witness in the scriptures, which show Him as a God of justice and as a God of forgiveness. God is holy and by no means overlooks sin or turns a blind eye to transgression. But God reveals His justice in forgiveness. God is love and so He fulfilled justice by sending His Son, who took our sin upon Himself on the cross so that through Him we would have forgiveness and become members of His kingdom. Repentance is to seek God in scripture, see Jesus as its centre and forgiveness as His purpose.

We repent by treasuring Christ in our hearts as Saviour and by seeking to honour Him through our discipleship. We pray that we may not give into temptation, fall into sin and dishonour the name into which we were baptized and with whose blood we are sanctified. We pray that we may live in such a manner that our words and actions express the love of God and the grace that is in Christ Jesus. In Colossians chapter four the apostle Paul said, “*Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*” We seek to honour Christ with our actions and make Him known as Saviour through our words, so that the Holy Spirit may bring other to repentance by creating faith in Christ in their hearts!

Repentance begins with the Holy Spirit working faith in our hearts through the gospel. Repentance continues as we grow in knowledge of the Lord, by becoming thoroughly acquainted with the scriptures; which St. Paul said to his disciple Timothy, “*are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*” Study of scripture is an important form of daily repentance. Repentance is to turn our hearts towards God by coming to Him with our prayers, praises and thanksgiving. The psalmist sang, “*Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules.*” God promises that when we turn to Him in prayer, He will turn to us with help and salvation.

Repentance is remembering our baptism and God’s promise to supply us with His grace and to continuously forgive, renew and heal our souls, for the sake of Christ our Saviour. In Romans, Paul wrote, “*We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*” The Holy Spirit is in our baptism to constantly renew our faith and empower our spirits through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Repentance is to come to Christ’s holy supper for spiritual nourishment, refreshment of our souls and the forgiveness of our sins. Repentance is to live as sons and daughters of God’s kingdom; worshipping Him alone as God, honouring Christ in one another by our actions and attitudes. Above all else, repentance is treasuring Jesus in our hearts as Saviour. God bless us always to repent and believe the gospel of His love and salvation in Christ Jesus. In His Name. Amen