

April 12, 2015

## REPENT

Matthew 4:12-17

It may have been during Jesus' time of Temptation, during His forty days in the wilderness, that John the Baptist was silenced and put into prison by Herod Antipas. His message upset the status quo. Herod had been ridiculed by him, religious leaders had been offended by him; the common people flocked to him. Those realities shook things up. John had claimed to be the one who was preparing the way of the Lord. (Matthew 3:3) And he promised that someone even greater was coming soon: *"He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire! His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing flood, gathering His wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire!"* (3:11-12)

And then came Jesus! Returning from the wilderness, hearing that John the Baptist had been arrested, He chose to live in Capernaum. Nazareth was a small, insignificant town, west of the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum was much larger, situated on the northwestern shores of this small lake. Capernaum was a central part of Galilee, making it no doubt that Jesus was definitely a Galilean, fulfilling another prophetic vision of Isaiah. The beginning of His ministry is the dawning of a great new light in a land of darkness. It is interesting to note, today, that for centuries Capernaum has not even existed. No one knows exactly what happened to it, who destroyed it, or, why; and scholars still debate, today which site of ruins might have been the city where Jesus lived.

Apparently, the people didn't ...repent!

But it was there that Jesus began His ministry. It was there that He called His disciples. And it was there that He performed many very significant miracles. Later, Jesus would denounce Capernaum, along with Korazin and Bethsaida: *"And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No. You will go down to the depths (or Hades). If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom on the Day of Judgment than for you!"* (Matthew 11:23-24) Jesus saw Capernaum as being worse than Sodom!

The first thing Jesus did, as He began His public ministry, was to pick up where John the Baptist left off. He said, *"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near!"* (Matthew 4:7) From then on, most of His preaching was about the Kingdom of Heaven and how to live for it.

I've spoken about Repentance, and how it is the Greek word *metanoia*, which, translated literally means *change of mind*; and how it implies changing your ways. It is more than just feeling sorry for our sins and asking for forgiveness. Repentance is not hard to understand, but realize, seriously, that there can be no real forgiveness if there is no real repentance. Many people take up Christianity the way they take up a political position. They just add it to their repertoire of beliefs and attitudes.

But real repentance includes four elements. First, it is to completely change your thought patterns; to change the way you think. For example, the way most people think about death is that it is the end of life. But, for Christians, it is to be thought of as the beginning of life-eternal. The world feels pain and anguish when there is a death. Some, as they are dying, are in fear. The Christian says, *"O Death, where is thy victory? O Death, where is thy sting?"* (1 Corinthians 15:55) For the Christian, there is hope, there is glory, there is joy! We are Resurrection People! We see things differently as we look at the world with Easter eyes. Yes, it may be sad to lose someone we have loved, but, at the same time, by grace, we rejoice! Likewise, we may fear the pain of dying, we may grieve over having to depart from our loved ones, but....there is to be joy, an exchange of *"a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified."* (Isaiah 61:3) There is a mixed blessing to human life. The difference is that, without faith, there is only woe. We have changed the way we think. We repent!

The second element of True Repentance: When we change the way we think, we will begin to change our attitudes. Rather than a me-first mentality, we will seek first God's Kingdom and God's righteousness! (Matthew 6:33) Rather than the idea that the means are justified by the ends – where it doesn't matter how we do it as long as we reach the outcome we wanted – we will always do good so that others may give glory to God. (Matthew 5:16) And rather than having the attitude that tells us to live only for today, we will practice good stewardship, we will not be wasteful, we will seek treasure in heaven, not on earth. For *where our treasure is there will our hearts be also!* (Matthew 6:21)

Third, True Repentance includes a change of heart. Remember Matthew 6:21 – “*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*” In many respects, it is also true that where your heart is there will your treasure be also. Change your mind and you will change your heart...usually. Change your heart and it will change your mind...usually. Here, we need to be methodical Methodists. Remember how John Wesley needed a heart-change after his failed mission work in the colony of Georgia. Peter Bohler told him that he, now, more than ever, needed to preach faith. But Wesley felt empty. He felt a terrible lack of faith. What could he preach? Bohler told him, then, to “preach faith, until you have it, and then, because you have it you will preach faith!” The mind will reach the heart, if your heart is open. And the heart will reach the mind, if the mind is open! The method is to use the one and the other will be filled. Change your heart (or, more accurately, let the Spirit change your heart), and your mind will follow!

Ultimately, True Repentance (element number four) goes even further than the ways we think. True Repentance is a matter of changing the ways we do things. Remember how John the Baptist told the people to share with those less fortunate. He told the tax collectors not to charge anything more than what was required. And he told the soldiers not to bully the people out of their money. (Luke 3:10-14) The message of the Church today ought to be that we need to change the ways we're doing things. The way the world is doing things isn't working. If it is, why are people complaining all the time? Why do so few of us get along? Why is there still racial prejudice, gender prejudice, age prejudice, class prejudice? Why do dictators still have any power? Why are there wars? Why are there financial shortfalls? Why do we keep building more and more bombs when there have been, for decades, so many nuclear bombs that we could obliterate the earth many times over? We need to change the ways we think, and then change the ways we're doing things.

It's all because we keep doing things the wrong way. We need to change the ways we're doing things. I don't have all the answers, and, no one's asking me, but I do know that insanity is sometimes defined as: when you keep on doing the same old things expecting different results. If we keep on doing what we've already done, we'll keep on getting what we've already got!

Don't we all want something better?

Repentance can also mean changing directions. First, we need to stop going the wrong way, though. Then we need to turn around. And .... I think we all need to read **The Map!**