

Sermon 2007 Advent 2  
Text: Matthew 3: 1-12  
Theme: "Repentance: More than a Feeling"

Repent or be Damned! Here ends the Gospel. Have a happy holiday.

Sometimes the Gospel doesn't sound so much like good news right? Here we are in the Advent season and we are all putting up decorations and planning parties and dinners and here comes John the Baptist, a great big wet blanket on the whole season! Way to dampen the spirit John! But maybe "repent" is not such a bad word.

Let's put John into some context. The Old Testament lesson is from Isaiah when King Ahaz had decided not to trust in God but to make an alliance with the Assyrians instead. That way, just in case God didn't keep his promises, King Ahaz could rely on the Assyrians. Does that sound like anyone you know? Is there a mirror anywhere around you? Oh sure I trust in God but I need a back up plan in case he doesn't come through.

God's people had been doing that for centuries and were still doing it when John was on earth. Always hedging their bets. Sure we *SAY* we trust in God but watch the actions. Where does

the larger check go? To the retirement fund or to God? Why do we worry about stuff if we trust in God? Why do we get so angry when things don't go according to our plan if we trust in God? When John calls us to repent, this is what he calls us to repent of.

Financial planners get a little frustrated with me because they think I'm morbid and flippant. Well, I am. I assume that the whole world is headed for death and destruction and there is no amount of money or planning that will stop that. I also firmly believe that God will be faithful to me and care for my needs. And I believe that we will all be together for eternity in a paradise that is not possible in this life. A truly repentant lifestyle often runs counter to popular financial planning.

Repentance is not just saying you're sorry to God although that might certainly be included. Repentance is also not just a singular event. Repentance is a lifestyle.

I bought Dänya a depression era vanity at a yard sale and I am in the process of refinishing it. Now I could just slap a coat of paint on it and call it good. But the paint would begin to crack and peel and the beautiful wood wouldn't show and it just

wouldn't be as great a piece of furniture. So I am painstakingly stripping layers and layers of paint and varnish and sanding it down step by step, inch by inch and one day, she will get a gorgeous vanity. We might be moving it into the nursing home but she will get it by golly!

Repentance too is a slow process; not just saying sorry and moving along, not just painting over the problems, but rather recognizing our Advent God in the midst of your life and constantly altering course to meet him. As we move along the path of life, Jesus is coming toward us slowly but surely.

Repentance is the slow process of stripping away everything that boxes Jesus in and blocks his path into our lives. As he comes closer and closer to us, he looms larger and larger and we begin to realize that he is substantially more than we first thought and we either get scared and veer off the path for some safety in human folly or we repent and face him dead on.

If we repent, we stand in the path of Jesus' coming and open ourselves to receiving Him who is more than we can comprehend. Repentance is risky.

When we repent, we risk everything of which we think we are certain. We risk our understanding of the world because that might have to change as Jesus draws near. We risk our future because that might have to change as Jesus draws near. We risk being wrong because we might find out that we are not so bright as we thought we were when we are standing in the light of Christ. We risk everything with which we define ourselves because Jesus will redefine us according to his will. It is risky to repent.

But it is also enormously freeing! Who cares who is marching against us King Ahaz? We are God's people and we don't need Assyria. So what if gas prices are up? What does it really matter whether Senator Obama or Mr. Giuliani are in the Oval Office? Stocks down? Health bad? Relationships rocky? Keep your eyes on Jesus. Stay on the path that leads toward him. Let all the dross of life wash away. Let him refine you with his holy fire and you will come to know true joy. Amen