

Advent 2 C 6th Dec 2009.

In our Gospel today is a very clear call to repentance. What does the word “repent” mean? It might fill your mind as it sometimes does mine with, “Just what is it we are to do?” What is repentance? Well, first of all, repentance is not the fear of God. I talked to an individual once and he said, “Well, sure, I’m scared of the old man,” meaning God. So what! Repentance is not conviction of sin. I was talking to a person on one occasion and this person said, “Well, I’m sorry but I know it.” So what! Fear of God and knowledge of sin is not repentance. Fear of God and knowledge of sin is essential, but not the essence of repentance. Repentance is not remorse. You can break a stone and that stone does not change its nature. It is still the same stone. It is just in smaller pieces. It is not just enough to be broken. It is not just enough to be contrite. It is not just enough to turn over a new leaf to mess up a clean page.

What is repentance? It is more than turning over our lives. It is more than just feeling sorry for our sins. Repentance means to change the direction of your life. It means to stop walking toward selfishness, self-centeredness, and a life that is centered upon what the self desires. It means to make a 180-degree turn, start walking toward God, his vision, his aim, and his goal for your life.

When Jesus came into the world, the dominant view of sin was going through one of God’s red lights. Sin was doing something wrong. But Jesus helped us to see that sin was more than just doing bad things and not doing good things. Sin is missing the mark, missing God’s purpose, goal, and ambition for your life. It means not going in the direction that God would have you to go. To repent means to turn from your sinfulness and turn toward the life that God has for you. There is definitely a clear call to repentance in our Gospel for today.

Also in our text is a warning that the time can be short. Notice the parable of the fig tree. A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He went again to the tree looking for fruit but did not find any. He said to the man that tended the vineyard, “For three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and have found none: cut it down.” By the third year, fig trees are supposed to bear fruit. That’s why you have a fig tree. Bearing fruit is the nature of a fig tree. By the third year, none! He said, “Cut it down!” Cut it down — strong words of judgment. It is not fulfilling its purpose. Chop it!

It has been said that W. C. Fields was reading the Bible on his death bed when someone asked him why he was doing that. He answered, “I’m looking for loopholes.” There are none! I’m reminded of the individual who said, “I have misjudged two things in life. I have misjudged the brevity of life and I have misjudged the breadth of eternity.” We’re all going to die. For some the time is shorter than for others. A clear call that time is running out. Christian, bear Christian fruit! That’s what Jesus is talking about. Is that not what we are to do as Christians? That’s why we are called Christians. We are to bear Christian fruit. We are to live a life that exudes Christlikeness.

We are called to produce Christlike fruit in our lives. It is a clear call to

repentance, and it is a warning that the time could be short. How many of us are guaranteed tomorrow? Today is the day, yet this parable ends on a note of grace because the man who tended the tree said, "Give me one more year. I will dig around the tree and fertilize the tree. Just give me one more year and if at the end of that year the tree does not produce fruit, then we will cut it down." This is a parable of mercy! This is a parable of grace! This is a parable of delayed judgment to give us time to repent! For you see, Scripture explicitly says God does not demand moral perfection. God knew we couldn't; God knew we wouldn't and that is why he sent his Son. God does not demand from us moral perfection! It is impossible! God knew we would sin! He knew we could not be perfect!

The book of Genesis says that God created our world and he said, "It is good! Everything about this world is good!" The best thing about this world is *you*. You are the zenith, the apex, and the climax of God's creation. You are the very best that God can do. Man and woman are the height of creation! God created us good. We are not bad people. We are good people who do bad. When we do bad, we need to turn back to God and repent of our sins. When we repent, a bunch of wonderful things happen: God restores us to life, he restores us to health, he restores us to a relationship with him and with others, and he clears the air. The greatest joy in life is to be forgiven and to walk in grace and mercy knowing that God loves and cares for you. God gave to us a way to deal with our sinfulness by Jesus' death on the cross. Scripture says that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner's repentance than over 99 people who have no need to repent.