

Luke 13:31-35
7 March 10

“Repent?”

Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem come from a loving, broken heart. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” Would that we could have a visual as well as a word picture of Jesus as he laments over Jerusalem! Maybe this will help. *Show move from Haiti*. Maybe from this tragedy you get some idea of the heartbreak in Jesus’ words. Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem come from a loving, broken heart. There is no scorn in this lament. There is only deep sadness and longing for Jerusalem to repent, to, in the words of the prophet Joel, “return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” Repent, return, be reconciled to God; let that relationship be restored. This is Jesus’ cry.

Lent has traditionally been a time for returning to the Lord, for repenting. Which maybe is why Lent is not so popular these days. Repenting doesn’t sound pleasant. When we think of repenting, we might think of fire and brimstone and condemnation. You know, like the early American preacher Jonathan Edwards’ fiery sermon, “Sinners in the hand of an angry God,” a sermon that had people rolling in the aisles groaning and moaning and with fear and trembling. Hard to imagine anything like that happening today. Today, people would just walk out on a sermon like that.

If repenting is not something we even want to think about in these days where we acknowledge mistakes but never wrongs, maybe it’s because we associate repentance with fire and brimstone and condemnation and not with grace, mercy, love, and longing. But that’s just how Jesus calls to us to repent today.

Jesus, warned that the powers that be in Jerusalem want to kill him, laments not over his own fate but over the city where those powers dwell. And he calls on the city to turn around, to repent. This is far from the only time Jesus calls out to us to repent, to return to the LORD our God. At the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus calls those who have gathered around him to “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” This repentance, the evangelists tell us, is *good* news. It means that God’s reign of justice and mercy and healing are at hand. Jesus calls us to repent, to turn around and see this good news in action and to be a part of it and live according to its values. And in next week’s Gospel in words not so gentle Jesus again calls for repentance, the kind of repentance that produces good fruit, which is its own special kind of good news.

Today’s call to repent is also good news. It’s good news because it means 1) that it ain’t too late, and 2) that Jesus believes we can change—or maybe it’s better to say we can *be* changed—for the better.

In his explanation to the part of the Lord’s Prayer that says, *And lead us not into temptation*, Martin Luther writes, “God tempts no one to sin, but we ask in this prayer that God would watch

over us and protect us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful desires may not deceive us and draw us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins.” Why out of all the possibilities does Luther single out despair as a great and shameful sin? Maybe it’s because despair drains us of hope. Despair leads us to believe that God can no longer do anything with us. Jesus’ call to repent is a needed reminder that in God’s view it’s not too late and that God’s forgiveness and the power of Jesus and his Spirit’s presence within us can transform us so much that God can do extraordinary things with ordinary people who, led by God’s Spirit, are willing to step out of their comfort zones and do God’s work. That’s true for us as individuals. And it’s also true for us as Living Water Lutheran Church.

Jesus is moving toward Jerusalem not to punish but to redeem, to bring forgiveness, life and salvation. His call for repentance comes from a loving, broken heart. It is sad beyond saying that in Jerusalem his heart will be broken both in metaphorical and literal ways. Sin is serious business with serious consequences. But when we hear Jesus’ call to repent, our focus should not so much be on our own brokenness but on the cross of Jesus and on God’s power to forgive, redeem, and make new.

I therefore call on you to repent, to honestly consider your life. How have you wandered away from God? What are those habits, those inclinations, those thought patterns, those things that need to be changed if you are to lead an abundant life? And as the elected leaders in this congregation, I call on church council to do the same for Living Water. Write them down. Can you give them up for Lent? Well, maybe it won’t happen quite that quickly. But I suspect Jesus has more faith in us than we do. In his eyes it’s not too late. In his eyes, through his cross, through body and blood, through his Spirit we can be changed.