

Third Sunday in Lent
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
The Rev. Jason S. Glombicki
March 24, 2019

My boyfriend grew up as a Unitarian Universalist. So, there are many things he does not understand about Christianity. One day he said, “I don’t understand Christians. You’re always talking about sin, what you did wrong, and you all seem so...sad.” Now, I’d like to think that’s not the case, and I like to emphasize the life-giving aspects of Christianity. But, when many of our members tell me how much they like the season of Lent, it’s hard to argue with my boyfriend. And, today’s gospel reading doesn’t help my argument either. After all, Luke writes, “...unless you repent, you will all perish...” and, in the parable, if the fig tree isn’t producing fruit then “buh bye.” But, we won’t tell Alex about today’s reading.

To grasp this story, let’s unpack what exactly we mean by repentance and how it relates to this parable. How might you define repentance? The heart of the Greek word that is translated in today’s reading as “repentance” could also be translated as turning around, starting over, taking another direction, or choosing another course.¹ So, repentance is more than saying “you’re sorry” and feeling bad about yourself.

As one theologian puts it, as written on the top of the handout in your bulletin: “In Luke-Acts, to repent is to turn away from the assumptions, attitudes and actions of the old age and to live towards the values and practices of the Realm of God as taught by Jesus and as embodied in the life of the church in Acts.”

Ok, so what do we do with that? Well, first what is the “Realm of God” in that definition? The Realm of God is another way to talk about the Kingdom of God or, in other words, God’s dream for what the world would look like. So, if the object of

¹ <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/11/advent-2-a-reclaiming-repentance/>

repentance is to move *away* from assumptions, attitudes, and actions of the old age *towards* the values and practices of the Realm of God, then we need to be clear on what that looks like. On the insert in your bulletin, I've done some work for you dissecting the gospel of Luke but I'm positive that I didn't get everything, so I left another bullet point for you to fill in other aspects of Luke's understanding of the Realm of God.

You see...

“Realm (Kingdom/Kin-dom) of God” in Luke

(see 6:12-19; 12:1-59; 11:37-52; 14:1-24; etc.)

- **Radical generosity** – live in the confidence of God's provisions, give abundantly
- **Servant leadership** – be responsible stewards of all things, lead by example
- **Peacemaking** – work towards awareness, love your enemy
- **Forgiveness** – liberate the poor and oppressed, release of negative emotions
- **Deep piety** – devotion to God's realm with humility, repent and turn toward God's realm
- **Reject religious hypocrisy** – welcome the outsider, strive for justice and love
- _____ – _____

So, the “old age” is all of the attitudes, assumptions, and values that are at odds or opposite of those of the “Realm of God.” So, what I'd invite you to do is to take a minute to ponder ways that you might repent. Think of a place in your life, our church, and our world where you can apply the repentance phrase “moving away from (insert an aspect of the old age) and move towards (an aspect of the Realm of God).”

Does anyone want to share?

- **In my life:** Moving away from a mindset of scarcity of money and resources, and move towards a life filled with the abundance of God's love and grace.

- In our church: Moving away from a mentality of taking care of the insiders, and move towards a radical welcome and engagement with those outside.
- In our world: Moving away from a mentality that sees “thoughts and prayers” after a mass shooting as enough, and move towards a mentality that turns towards God’s realm that values wholeness and responsibly.

You see, Christianity isn’t about sadness. Instead, Christianity has a flavor of repentance that draws us towards mindfulness. Together we become mindful of the world as it is right now, what Dr. Allen called the “old age,” and we place it in conversation with the “Realm of God.” But Christianity is not about guiltting you into thinking that everything is bad and going down the drain; rather, repentance is an awareness exercise that helps us pause to re-evaluate and to notice the work God is already doing in our midst.

That’s where the whole manure thing from today’s parable comes in. For, oftentimes, we are like the fig tree stuck in its way of holding onto our fruit. We fear sharing the gifts of the vine, we fear being vulnerable, and instead we’re so stuck in our own minds that our main God-given function, that is to produce fruit, is stunted. But instead of a wrathful God who comes to obliterate us for failing to recognize our baptismal calling to work for justice, peace, and love, we have a God who lovingly cares for us. A God who helps to extract the toxic soil around us that chokes us from our purpose, and who replaces it with the best of gifts to nurture our calling.

Friends, those are the gifts God gives to us here in this community. God provides us a community that accepts us as we are, with all our complexity, doubt, frustration, anxiety, grief, and shame. For, in baptism God reminds us that we are supported with unconditional love and, at this table, God’s gifts are poured out and broken for you. And, with these gifts, we can strive to be courageous, confident, and calm in our God. With these gifts, we can take pause and evaluate ourselves and the world with God’s

eyes. With these gifts, we can discover that we are set us free to love our neighbors and serve all of creation.

So, there it is, friends. Today we are given an opportunity to evaluate our priorities and shift them towards a vision of God's world. Yet, we do not do it alone. We gather here with God's faithful people, knowing that the journey is filled with God's extracting shovel and nurturing soil. And in that journey, we will grasp a vision of God's garden blooming with pears of peace, grapes of generosity, and figs of forgiveness. Thanks be to our faithful and loving God.