

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

March 23, 2025



REPENT

the virtue of a second chance

by Drew Downs

The word “repent” has a bad reputation. We associate it with angry street preachers who berate us of our “immorality” and tell us to get our hearts right or we’ll burn. None of us likes being told we’re wrong. Doubly so when the person telling us we’re wrong may just as easily be convicted of the same crime.

Often, we dismiss these invitations to change as a matter of tone — as in, they aren’t asking very nicely and we aren’t in the

mood to listen to them. If they asked nicely, we might consider it. Except we probably still wouldn’t.

When Jesus tells us we need to repent, he’s doing so, not from a place of virtue, as the street preachers who assert that they are inherently without sin, but from a place of wisdom which says we all need to change, that we all need second chances, and that it isn’t too late to do it now.

LENT

2025

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Repent!

I've taken to appreciating the word *repent*. Primarily because it is a word Jesus uses. A lot. And it's a word he associates with his mission — a mission that grew out of John the Baptizer's mission.

Many of us have bad associations with the word. And the conviction. Perhaps even the very idea of being told by another human person that we need to repent. It leaves a bad taste in the mouth, we might say. It doesn't ring true. Or somehow *fit* how we see things. Insert other cliches here.

Chief among our cliches, I suspect, is the notion that we hate change. And it would be hard to repent of sin if we aren't also talking about changing our ways — it is precisely what we're dealing with.

This is more excuse than truth. There is comfort in stasis — and in addiction. A refusal to change is not a sign of virtue. I might go so far as to say our stubbornness and whitewashing of bad behavior under the auspices of how *hard* change is or how *we* shouldn't have to change because *nobody likes it* has the spiritual authority of a toddler refusing their peas. It is not rational, supportive, or honest. It's just willful and defiant.

To repent simply means "to turn". And when Jesus invites us to turn, he's setting us on a new path to follow. One that will make us all and each healthier. Now and in the many days to come.

With love,
Drew+

LENT

2025

FOR SUNDAY

Lent 3C

March 23, 2025

Collect

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

Luke 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them--do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

LENT

Reflection

Reading this passage, one might feel like they're missing something. There are two tragedies here that they probably want to know more about – both dealing with people who died. But *knowing* about these events would do little to help us what Jesus is directing us to see: assumed inferiority.

Jesus directs the attention of these city people to their presumed condemnation of the country bumpkins from the north, asking if they assume their suffering *must* be a result of sinfulness and not, say, the violent, outrageous, and pathetic evil of Herod! No, he says, if you don't repent, you will have the same fate.

The second story matches the first *in this same way*. The tragedy of the people who were crushed to death – that isn't a result of sin. The innocent and the guilty *both get crushed*. Here the message Jesus keeps repeating: Repent! We're all in this boat together!

Use this understanding with the fig tree which chooses to never bear fruit. It isn't sinful and therefore can't. Nor is it sinful as a matter of birth. The question of its sin isn't relevant! It's a tree that is choosing to avoid doing good! The gardener wants to give it one last chance – to repent, to turn from its current path – and to choose to bear fruit worthy of repentance.

The problem here is comparison and judgment. And these people seeking guidance keep obsessing about that stuff when Jesus says we're all in this. This is about us all. And this obsessing about someone else's sin is bound to leave us in the falling path of the tower or as the sacrifice of a petty tyrant.

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