

## SEQUOYAH HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

### Sermon, "Jesus' Very First Sermon"

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**Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 55:6-9, Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

**New Testament Reading: Mark 1:9-15, In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'**

**And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.**

**Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'**

Jack was a painter, and he often would thin his paint so it would go further. So when a church decided to do some deferred maintenance, Jack was able to put in the low bid, and got the job. As always, he thinned his paint way down with turpentine.

One day while he was up on the scaffolding – the job almost finished – he heard a horrendous clap of thunder, and the sky opened. The downpour washed the thinned paint off the church and knocked Jack off his scaffold and onto the lawn, amid puddles of thinned and worthless paint. Jack knew this was warning from Almighty God, so he got on his knees and cried: "Oh, Lord! Forgive me! What should I do?" And from the thunder a mighty voice: "REPAINT, REPAINT and THIN NO MORE"

"Repent and believe in the good news," Jesus proclaimed as he came onto the public scene. Speaking for myself, and perhaps also for you. Repent is a rather heavy word, with the thought of doing penance for sin, sin that sometimes brings a horrendous clap of thunder, kind of a word of condemnation. But as always with Jesus, it is not about condemnation (for God sent His son into the world not to condemn the world); it is a powerful word of INVITATION. To Repent. It is not about thinning or not thinning paint; it's about LIFE, and the call of the Lord on us, and our belief in this good news!

*Jesus said, I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Lk 5*

*And ...There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. Lk 15:7*

*Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent. Mt 11:20*

*And He sent the disciples, and they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. Mk. 6:12 And Jesus said ....Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations ... all peoples the world over! Lk 24:46-7*

WHY does Jesus call for us to repent? Why is this at the core of all his teaching? Because the Kingdom of God is at hand! The long-awaited Messiah had come to break the power of sin and renew God's reign on earth! Things would be made right, not fully right yet, but in certain process. The kingdom of God was here, though it had to pass through the cross, and it still passes through many hard things, as the community of Parkland, Florida so grievously experienced this week. But good news, as Jesus said, is given to the poor, release to those who are in captivity, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, and the Year of the Lord's favor; and the resurrected Lord (out of death itself) promises the same resurrection to all who believe and look for His return. So Jesus said, "Pray in this way, Thy Kingdom come!"

In 1995 a pastor Dr. Darryl Johnson preached in a congregation of which I was part. He gave these powerful words:

"When God's good news for the world announced by and about Jesus grabs hold of an individual or a community something happens. What is the good news Jesus came announcing. The good news is 'The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near.' It's incredibly good news. In Jesus the future is spilling into the present. In Jesus heaven is invading earth. In and because of Jesus, heaven's light is invading earth's darkness, heaven's joy is invading earth's sorrow, heaven's power is invading earth's weakness, heaven's health is invading earth's brokenness, heaven's freedom is invading earth's addictions, heaven's love, the love of God, is invading earth's hostilities, heaven's life, the life of the Triune God, is invading earth's death. In and because of Jesus, the kingdom of God has come near. Now when that Gospel, when Jesus and his kingdom, grab hold of an individual or a community, something happens; something has to happen. We are changed. Oh, we're not made perfect, at least not yet, but we are changed."

Change, to change is the very meaning of the word "Repent." It is so much beyond the thinning or not thinning of paint. It is not just being sorry for the consequences of our sin, when we're caught. It is a Change that makes us sorry to hurt or offend the Savior, and to miss (in a choice we make) being part of this kingdom. It's a change that turns us to God, and makes us into new creations!

The greek word for "Repent" is Metanoia – which means to change one's mind – and as it is connected to the Kingdom- to turn one's mind to God, in obedience and surrender, as part of this kingdom which DOES have a King. (and we are not him)

In Genesis 3, we know how Adam and Eve, and all of humanity, rejected God and His rule. Satan lied in the Garden, "You will be like God, knowing good and evil." Satan's suggestion was that "instead of taking daily walks with God in the cool of the day, hearing from God and receiving wisdom from him, we could figure things out ourselves. Satan promoted independent living (living out of self), rather than dependent living (out of God). Living out of our own strength and initiative - this is the foundational sin, out of which all other sins flow.

All through the centuries, in rejecting God, his people rejected the One Ruler who would in fact set them free. Jesus came to restore this life. It would be bad news for the Pharisees and others who didn't want to give up control. It would be good news for People who hungered for a Lord, a Master, who would be deserving of everything they could give him.

Pursuing a bit further that definition of repent, it means "to perceive, in one's mind, afterwards." It reminds me of the Apostle Paul, how after reminding the Romans of what Jesus has done for them, says "Therefore, do not be confirmed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may prove what is the will of God" - that they might DO it.

"Take my will and make it thine, it shall be no longer mine;" this is a song of the church, very different from the song known throughout our world, "I did it my way."

Perhaps the prayer we make should be like this, "Lord, I am not my own, I have been bought with a price, and I live to serve you. So, Lord, change me, even the very expectation of HOW you are going to work your kingdom in my life, my family. Help me turn away from self-centeredness and self-control and turn my life over to your direction and control, to your way in big ways, even in small ways."

Several months ago I decided to make a new little practice in my life. That is, to actually stop at stop signs. You see, I have tended to roll through them, when the coast seemed clear and no one was watching. I decided to stop because it's the law, and to help me remember that there is someone in control and it is not me! It's a small way to acknowledge his rule in my life.

Where might God be wanting to break through in your life in a new, deeper way, to reign and rule there? Dr. Eugene Peterson calls this a "Long obedience in the same direction." Ultimately God must do it, and HE does!

Friday I was sitting in my study here; just outside my door, along the cement walkway I saw a lizard, scampering about, and a bird pecking at it. The bird couldn't pick it up because the lizard was too big; but it was harassing it. I said, "Stop it, bird!" Eventually the lizard was completely still and the bird went away. I checked on the lizard; he was still very intact, but had peck marks all over him. Could he be dead or just stunned? I plugged a little grass and put it near his head, for some comfort for him on that hard cement. Shortly after it began to rain. I went out again and looked; the lizard moved a bit, his eye and limb. I had a meeting to go to, and while I was there, it poured. When I returned, the lizard was gone! He revived!! I stood there and thought just like the rain, God's love washes over us! God's love washed over Jesus at his baptism; and it washed over Jesus while he was in the wilderness, wild beasts and the angels cared for him, and it washes over us, as we too hear "you are my beloved, with you I am well pleased" And then also, we come to know he is carrying us in the hardest of times. And he makes us want to change and be changed, to be part of him, his work in our world, and under his faithful rule and love, to take us, to have more of us, and to believe in Him!!

**In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.**