

“a lesson in life:
remorse versus repentance”
Isaiah 40:3-5, Mark 1:1-8 Luke 3:7-14

It seems important to begin this morning by pointing out what this sermon is not. This sermon is not about John the Baptist, foretelling the coming of Christ. John was a prophet and being a prophet has nothing to do with foretelling, i.e. prophecy. Being a prophet means announcing to people that their actions have consequences and that God sees what is going on: **THEY NEED TO CHANGE**. Incidentally, the message often takes the shape of an announcement about the future where there will be dire consequences for the actions they make today. But the message wasn't about the foretelling, it was about our actions having consequences.

Incidentally, Jesus was a prophet. The message which John brought was the message which was the foundation of Jesus ministry: God is at hand, repent. (We will discuss this in January)

Second, a word about the sermon title. This is not a lesson in life (small “l”, accompanied by frilly flowers and gentle lyrical music). This is not a gentle bumper sticker, nor is it wisdom for a needlepoint wall hanging. This is a lesson about the content of faith, the content of a faithful life. This is a lesson about the **NEW LIFE** which is ours in Jesus Christ.

We have already summed it up: the **NEW LIFE**. It's not the old life. Life in faith is a changed life. It is changed from being concerned with yourself to being focused on God and your neighbor.

In the midst of this journey into a new and faithful life we have become distracted, and distracted by the church's misteachings. The misteaching has a significant attachment to the revival message. The revival message is that you are a sinner, and then convicted (conviction) of your sin you should turn to Jesus (repent= turning from/moving from). But along the way the church fell into confusing remorse, that is feeling sorry, for repentance, that is making a change. The church confused being sorry with making a change! And it attached this mistake to the announcement of forgiveness. Forgiveness, as John the Baptist makes clear, is given for repentance. Forgiveness is offered in order to remove a further obstacle for change, **BUT IT IS GIVEN FOR CHANGE**.

We have seen in recent weeks that remorse and repentance are not the same and that being sorry doesn't matter. The example is the parable of the talents. The Poor steward was sorry that they weren't a better steward, but they left it there. Talent, buried in the ground.

My point here is that the forgiveness is given for the change. If you don't change, forgiveness doesn't matter.

This is further seen in the “Smoker's problem”. During seminary I watched my seminary friends quit smoking.

14 times. 14 times they tried.

And finally, they succeeded. Now in each of the 14 attempts – they knew what they needed to do. They knew they needed to quit – they had remorse about smoking. **BUT THAT'S NOT ENOUGH**. What is enough is **making** the change. Accomplishing the faithfulness. Enacting the **NEW LIFE**. **FORGIVENESS DOESN'T MATTER IF WE DON'T CHANGE!**

Building the new life takes hard work, persistence, creativity and means making new patterns. The new life **is** the faithfulness into which we are called by Christ.

John appears in the Judean countryside calling for a changed life. He calls for a faithful life which befits change! Repentance. A Life which befits the Kingdom of God. A Life of stewardship and grace. (If your neighbor doesn't have a coat and you have two – give him one of yours)

In this Advent and in the journey of faith, I invite you into an amazing **journey into a place we have not seen, yet which is beginning right now in us – the Kingdom of God**, the new life together in Christ. A journey of faith and faithfulness, a journey of our lives changed fully into **a love of God and neighbor**. (It is) the NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.