

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

6th December 2020

MARK 1:1-8

ADVENT: A TIME TO CHANGE

Change. Some of us embrace it. Some of us run from it. Some of us think it is ok in its place. I've known of people who describe themselves as 'change junkies', and others who by their words or their actions, or both, make it very clear that they don't think anything should be changed, ever.

But a desire for changing ourselves must be there in a lot of us, because personal change is the theme for a lot of what is called entertainment, and it's also used a lot by advertisers. A lot of reality TV shows revolve around change, don't they? They focus on people's journey from being to single to married, being unhealthy to healthy, and even on buildings from being totally unliveable and undesirable to being dwellings many people would love to live in.

And what about advertising? Think about the ads you see, hear or watch, how many of them are using the enticement to change to try and get you to throw some money their way? They might offer us increased wealth, better health, more happiness, greater safety, more enjoyment; so many of the means they use to sell their products or services to us are centred on the opportunity to change something about ourselves or our lives.

With both the TV shows and the marketing it's like the basic assumption is that many of us want to change, to flip our lives around, but that we need the inspiration, help or assistance to do it. And, while lots of us might be happy with how we look, the car we drive, the house we live in, even the hobbies or interests we have, we are regularly faced with the question, 'are you really? Wouldn't a change be good for you?'

Again, we are all different. Some of us like to change often, and some don't want to change anything ever, and many of us are in the middle. And that's all ok.

Whatever we might each think of change, there is one part of our lives which we do always need to examine, and change, and that's our relationship with God. Because we're all born with original sin we are, by our human nature, in rebellion against God. Even when we love God, trust God, are thankful to God and want to follow God, this sinful nature still comes in and affects and influences what we do and how we relate to God, meaning, as Paul writes so well in Romans 7, that 'The good I want to do isn't what I do, but the bad I don't want to do, this is what I end up doing'. We are constantly living with, working against, and sometimes succumbing to, this sinful nature, which affects our relationship with God. And this needs to flip around, or change.

In the Old Testament God sent prophets like Isaiah, Malachi, Hosea and Elijah to call the people to repent and turn back to God, at the same time telling them that God was sending a Saviour who would change their relationship with God once and for all. The last of these prophets was the one we hear from today, John, known as the Baptist. John is described here at the beginning of Mark's Gospel as the one promised by Isaiah to get the road ready for the Saviour. The message he brings is one calling people to change; "Turn back to God and be baptized! Then your sins will be forgiven." (*Mark 1:4b CEV*)

Repent! Turn back to God! Flip it around! Do we need to do this? Absolutely, it's a change we all need to make all the time. That word 'repent' literally means to turn around, to turn back. For me the image which comes into my head when I hear this word is the one we get in the parable of the prodigal son. This story gives us such a great image of what it means to repent, to completely turn around and go back to God. This son had taken everything he had and gone away from the father to live to just please

himself. When he hit rock bottom and realised his relationship with his father was his only hope, he then physically made the journey back to him; he turned around and went back.

The part of this image we all love, is that the father is not only wanting to receive him back, but he has been waiting and doing all he can to make it possible for the son to come back. We love it because we know this is such a good illustration of God our Father, and how He wants us all to be with Him and so does everything He can to make this possible, including sending His Son to die so we can all be forgiven.

And for us, as John begins to teach us here, the promise of this love of God is sealed with us in our Baptism; the promise that no matter how far we go away from God, He is always there like the Father in the parable wanting to welcome us back to Him.

This time Advent, the four weeks before Christmas, is a busy time for us in so many ways. But in the middle of the preparations we are making we are also getting prepared to celebrate the birth of our Saviour. To get prepared for that, we have the words of John and the other prophets calling us to repent, to flip around, to turn back to God. How is that going to look for us? Are there things in our lives which aren't the way they could be as someone who has Jesus as their Saviour? Do we have relationships we need to examine and try to turn around so that they better reflect God's love? Are there things or people in our lives which are coming between us and God, meaning that we need to examine our priorities and our balances? If I am looking at myself really honestly, as hard I might find it to change myself, with God's help what do I need to change and flip around so I can live out His love and His calling to serve and follow Him?

Right now, there are lots of voices calling to us, some good, some okay, some not so good, and a part of repenting is knowing the difference and listening to the ones we

should follow and ignoring the ones we shouldn't. Remember also that we always need to hear God's call of repentance; the call to examine our relationship with God and to turn to follow Him. John the Baptist came out with his message from the desert, or the wilderness, calling people to turn back to God. In the desert which can be our lives and our world, the call still comes today; 'The Saviour is here to open the way for you, and the Father is always ready and waiting to welcome you; turn back to Him.' Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

Advent: A Time of Preparation

- What things are you getting prepared for right now; gift buying, visitors coming, going away, Christmas celebrations?
- As much as none of these things are bad, we can allow them to take over our time, thoughts and energy so that we have less time to focus on the real meaning of Christmas. Is there anything you can do to fix this balance?
- Think about ways you can keep a regular focus on the birth of the Saviour this Advent; start a Bible reading plan, listen to Christian carols, take time to reflect on what Christmas means for you.

Repent! Turn Back!

Sin is a part of the lives of us all, we are born into it. That's why the call to repent is there for us all.

- What does 'repent' mean to you? What images, stories or examples come into your head when you hear this word?
- Is it easy to repent, to change our direction so that we are walking the way God calls us to walk? What things, both inside and outside of ourselves, can make this turn around difficult?
- Think (to yourself) what you need to repent of. Remember that God gives you forgiveness for these things. Pray that God will show you how to turn back to Him and give you the strength to so.

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