

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster....” (Joel 2:12–13)

Ash Wednesday will be here before you know it! It begins the season of Lent, a season of repentance. But what does that mean?

I don’t think we actually understand repentance. “Repent” seems to have lost its muster. To most people, I think it simply means to feel bad about a sin. This feeling bad – contrition – is a good and necessary feeling. But repentance is more than contrition. To repent is something much more life-changing. It means to change course, to turn to God.

How can we turn to God, though? Judgment comes from our holy God, judgment on our sin and the sin of the world. We sinners can’t be in the presence of a holy God. Yet, this same holy God calls us to turn to him anyway. *Return to Yahweh your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster* (Joel 2:13). Despite the fact that we are rebels, born enemies of God, our Lord is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. And because of that, we can turn to him – we can repent!

Despite what some in the world might claim or think, God doesn’t sit up in heaven twiddling his thumbs waiting to judge and condemn sinners. In his Son Jesus Christ, God showed his grace and mercy. He poured out his righteous anger for sin on him who became sin for us, that we might be reconciled to God. Instead of hopelessly full of sin, we become righteous in Christ. Instead of rebels facing judgment, we become friends of God, children adopted in his love. Instead of fearing what is to come, we hope and trust that Christ is coming for our good. Because we are in Christ, we are new creations. We have forgiveness, life, and salvation.

So, we repent. We turn to this God who has shown us grace, mercy, and blessing in his Son. As we hear this call again every Lent. Yes, we are dust, and to dust we shall return. But, even more, we repent and believe the Gospel – the good news! Our God is a God of grace and mercy, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. And he shows us this in his Son, Jesus Christ. For seven weeks, we are reminded again that God saves us in Christ. When we repent, when we turn to our Lord, we do nothing more than return to the beginning, where God is God, our Savior, and we are his servants. We return to the place where God became our God – the holy font, where he showered his grace and mercy on us by marking us with his name. We return to the table where he promises to be with us even now. God’s promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation are sure, because the Lord is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Turn to him!

-Pastor Squire

“O Lord, throughout these forty days You prayed and kept the fast; inspire repentance for our sin, and free us from our past.”

(“Jesus! Name of Wondrous Love” *LSB 900*, v. 5)