

**Pastor Roy's sermon from December 4, 2016 (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent)**

My stuff. Prayer/meditation. Making room for spontaneous acts and thoughts of compassion.

What is repentance? Is it saying we're sorry? (warning: Trick question!) Is it mainly about stopping the bad stuff we think and do? Or is there something more?

John the Baptist speaks of "bearing good fruit worthy of repentance." So, repentance has something to do with bearing good fruit.

Paul says, "Live in harmony with one another, welcome one another," and "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." So repentance for Paul is about positive choices and grace-filled actions. Repentant faith is joy, peace, and hope. Repentance produces the fruit of the Spirit.

Isaiah spots a branch growing out of the root of Jesse, the clan of David. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest on that branch, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in God. He will not judge by impulse, but with true justice and equity. The poor will be judged with equity—they will be given an opportunity to overcome. The branch of Jesse does not compete for limited resources or the needs of a fragile ego.

[The wicked are those who take advantage of their neighbor, those who make their living from others' misfortune, their path is the path of destruction, loss, and broken community. To the extent that we participate in these behaviors, we are the wicked, those out of balance.]

Isaiah calls his people, he calls us, to the way of peace. He pairs unlikely wild animals. No, of course we should not expect to see lions, leopards, and wolves becoming vegetarians. But Isaiah is reminding us of a powerful unity in creation. Each animal takes what it needs and ultimately gives itself away. This is the way of peace, the truth which governs the world. Anyone that stands against this way of peace runs counter to the creator and creation. Such powers and ways undo themselves, for they cannot last. Greed is unsustainable. In nature, anything out of balance will eventually come back into balance. Everything runs its course. God's mercy stands against injustice and inequity. The Spirit invites us to live in mercy and peace. When we look at our lives and we see injustice, greed, unhealthy clinging to what we cannot keep or use, we are called to repent by living just lives, generous lives, lives of balance and grace. The result of living such lives is peace, hope, the good fruit of repentance.

In fact, if a spiritual practice begins with anything but prayer, it is doomed to miss the mark of God's mercy and peace. Especially repentance which absolutely depends on waiting for and listening to God.

So I want to invite you to do two things. First, daydream God's vision for you.

Second, how can you use your gifts to live into that vision? That is repentance. Living into the goodness of God's mercy in the ways available to us.

For example, is there an unhealthy relationship you can work to repair or address? Can you imagine using your time differently--toward a better end? Is there some practice or habit you might take up that would produce more abundant life for you or those around you? Might you dedicate time for setting other things aside and simply praying? Or perhaps volunteering somewhere or working in a new way with others for the benefit of our community.

In this season of Advent, of remembering the ways Christ comes among us, let us live into a holy vision of justice and mercy within and around us. God give you strength as you do so. Amen.