

I.N.I.

Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 22, 2020
Matt. 26:69-27:5

In Christ Jesus, Who desires that none should perish, but that all be brought to repentance and live,
Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In the first of his 95 theses nailed on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Martin Luther wrote; **WHEN OUR LORD AND MASTER JESUS CHRIST, SAID "REPENT YE!" HE MAKES CLEAR THAT THE WHOLE LIFE OF HIS BELIEVERS IS TO BE A CONSTANT OR UNENDING REPENTANCE...**

Today we came before God, confessed our sins and repented of them. God's Word is filled with calls to repentance; Mark 1:15 **THE TIME HAS COME. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND, REPENT AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL.** In Luke 13:5 Jesus said, **UNLESS YOU TOO REPENT, YOU WILL ALL LIKewise PERISH!** Just before He ascended into heaven, Jesus directed His disciples: **THAT REPENTANCE AND REMISSION OF SINS SHOULD BE PREACHED IN HIS NAME.**

Fulfilling those words of Jesus, Peter declared on that first Pentecost Sunday, **REPENT, AND LET EVERYONE OF YOU BE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS.**

Sometime later in the temple Peter proclaimed: **REPENT THEREFORE AND BE CONVERTED, THAT YOUR SINS MAY BE BLOTTED OUT, SO THAT TIMES OF REFRESHING MAY COME FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD,**

Examples of repentant believers abound in the Bible; Job declared, **I ABHOR MYSELF, AND REPENT IN DUST AND ASHES.** David cried out, **I ACKNOWLEDGED MY SIN TO YOU, AND MY INIQUITY I HAVE NOT HIDDEN, I SAID, I WILL CONFESS MY TRANSGRESSIONS TO THE LORD,** and as we read in our first Scripture reading in Ps. 51 David wrote, **FOR I ACKNOWLEDGE MY TRANSGRESSION AND MY SIN IS EVER BEFORE ME. AGAINST YOU, YOU ONLY HAVE I SINNED, AND DONE THIS EVIL IN YOUR SIGHT.**

And it is at times like these, when our life and world is turned upside down by events and issues beyond our control that we are led to think about life and death matters. Then we too need to ask ourselves what is God teaching us by letting a microscopic virus disrupt the whole world and affect the life of every person on earth. One of the purposes of God's Judgments is to lead His people closer to Him and to turn those who have wandered away from Him to come back to Him and that is through repentance.

The word "repent" is one of the most important words in the Scriptures. Repent and repentance occurs over 100 times in the Bible. Next to the word "believe" the word "repentance" describes all that is worked in the heart that is necessary to receive salvation from sin and its punishment. So what is repentance?

Repentance involves a complete change of heart and life.

1) Repentance in a narrow sense is heartfelt sorrow for our sin which is produced by the Law of God; that is terror that strikes the conscience through the knowledge that because of sin we have deserved God's temporal and eternal wrath and punishment. Through repentance we realize that our sin has broken God's unchangeable Law.

2) Repentance in the broad sense includes faith, produced by the Gospel, which believes that sins are forgiven for the sake of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We heard Paul write in our second reading, **FOR GODLY SORROW PRODUCES REPENTANCE TO SALVATION, NOT TO BE REGRETTEd; BUT THE SORROW OF THE WORLD PRODUCES DEATH.** A perfect example of what Paul means is found in our sermon text concerning the events early on Good Friday morning.

In our text we have examples of two of Jesus' disciples who have fallen into sin and their results. Both are quite well known to most of us. The first case is Peter.

Peter **WANTED TO SEE THE END.** No doubt this was more than just curiosity that compelled him and John to follow Jesus at a distance after He was arrested—more than just a desire to see what would happen to His Lord. I'm sure Peter was moved by his love for Jesus. Perhaps he remembered his boast that he had made earlier that night; **EVEN IF I HAVE TO DIE WITH YOU I WILL NOT DENY YOU,** and **EVEN IF ALL ARE MADE TO STUMBLE (FALL AWAY) BECAUSE OF YOU, I WILL NEVER BE MADE TO STUMBLE.**

Well if you remember we are told that when Jesus was arrested all the disciples fled. Peter no doubt was embarrassed by his action of fleeing, after he had boldly struck out with his sword. This was not Peter's character to flee, to run away from trouble. So when Peter and John regained their composure they followed Jesus and the angry mob at a distance. They came to the courtyard and because John knew the High Priest he went in and then spoke to one of the servant girls and got Peter into the outer courtyard area. Yes, Peter was willing to give his life for Jesus, willing to place himself into this dangerous situation, but the problem was Peter entered this situation relying upon himself; his confidence was in his boast, in his faith, in his own strength; not in His Savior.

We are told that shortly after he entered the courtyard the servant girl who kept watch over the gate said to Peter; **YOU ALSO WERE WITH JESUS OF GALILEE** and **ARE YOU NOT ONE OF THIS MAN'S DISCIPLES?** Peter in fear for his life denied it, saying; **WOMAN, I DO NOT KNOW HIM. I DO NOT KNOW WHAT YOU ARE SAYING.** The rooster crowed and Peter tried to mingle with the crowd.

Another servant girl said to those around her; **THIS FELLOW ALSO WAS WITH JESUS OF NAZARETH.** This time Peter backs up his answer with an oath, and says **I DO NOT KNOW THE MAN.** According to Luke's Gospel about an hour passes and again some of the people come up to Peter and say, **SURELY YOU ALSO ARE ONE OF THEM, BECAUSE YOUR SPEECH BETRAYS YOU. YOU ARE A GALILEAN.** Then an eyewitness comes forward, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off in the Garden and he says; **DIDN'T I SEE YOU IN THE GARDEN WITH HIM?** The accusations are getting stronger and more intense. In total despair for his life, with a panic filled heart, Peter begins to curse and to swear, calling down upon Himself God's condemnation if he knew this man named Jesus and immediately the rooster crowed the second time.

Again we are told from the Gospel of Luke that at that exact moment Jesus was being transferred from one trial to another and as He passed through the courtyard He looked upon Peter. That look of love reached Peter's heart and Peter remembered the words of the Lord. His sin was laid bare. It was revealed to him. His soul and conscience burned within him. He realized what he had done. He had denied His loving Lord to whom he had promised faithfulness until death. In his heart-felt grief, he didn't see any more enemies, or danger or death. For death now lived within his own heart. He went out and shed bitter tears, tears of godly sorrow and repentance. Remorse for what he had done filled his soul. He admitted to his actions, to his lying words. Great darkness had enveloped him, but not a darkness of complete despair.

Yes, he went out of the courtyard, away from Christ physically, but not spiritually. The Word turned him to Jesus. His sinful pride, his exalted ego was crushed and smashed. Through godly sorrow and repentance he was restored to the Lord. Peter in his repentant sorrow clung to Jesus for forgiveness. God's Word turned his heart and changed it from a proud, self-trusting one to one that looked to Jesus alone for help, strength and forgiveness! Peter's sin was grievous, but his repentance was real sorrow and a humble, confident trust in His Savior's forgiving love.

Judas' sin was no greater nor no less than Peter's. He had sold his Lord into the hands of His enemies. Jesus knew what Judas had come to do in the Garden. He said to Judas, **ARE YOU BETRAYING THE SON OF MAN WITH A KISS?** Judas saw Jesus calmly, willingly allow Himself to be bound and led away. He heard Jesus plead for the safety of His disciples. And now Judas heard that Jesus was condemned to die by crucifixion.

We don't know if Judas was present at the trials of Jesus, but we can assume by his reaction that he closely followed the proceedings. It became more and more apparent that Jesus was the Messiah and that He was innocent of any charges of blasphemy. Judas began to think. What have I done? **I HAVE BETRAYED THE LORD, THE PROMISED SAVIOR INTO THE HANDS OF HIS ENEMIES!**

The terrors of hell filled his heart and conscience. Darkness enveloped his soul as it did Peter's. Even as Peter heard the rooster crow in his ears, and he realized his sin; no doubt Judas heard the jingling of the 30 pieces of silver in his pocket and he realized his sin. The sound of the money which he had so greedily longed for and taken, now became a death knell and shrieked their accusation against him. He couldn't stand it. He tried to rid himself of the cursed payment. In true sorrow and remorse he tried to give it back. **I HAVE SINNED AND I HAVE BETRAYED INNOCENT BLOOD,** He cried out! A proper confession.

Perhaps it's not too late to rescue Jesus from his fate. But Judas meant nothing to the chief priests and elders. With a shrug they tell Judas to mind his own business. He got what he wanted and they got what they wanted. The deal was done. Coldly, unsympathetically they turn Judas away and tell him to handle his problem by himself. **WHAT IS THAT TO US? YOU SEE TO IT!**

These religious leaders are just like Satan and the world who lure us into believing that they are our dear friends. They disguise themselves as caring, loving friends concerned about our welfare, about our happiness. But when we have fallen for their lies they could care less about us. They had used Judas as their tool to accomplish their purpose. His guilt, his future fate, whatever it would be was of no interest or concern to them. What a sad commentary on the religious leaders of that day. You might expect that of the ungodly Romans; but priests and elders?

Judas goes to the temple and casts the money in. He gives it back to God, perhaps in a futile attempt to get peace of conscience, relief from his tormented soul; cleanse himself of the guilt; somehow make up for his sin. But nothing works. Nothing he can do works, nothing washes the blood stained betrayal from his heart. Nothing man can ever do can pay for even one misdeed---not going to church, not saying prayers, not giving offerings, not doing good deeds....**NOTHING!**

Judas indeed sorrowed, sorrowed and grieved greatly over what he had done, as Peter did. But Judas' sorrow was a cry of terror without faith. He did not believe in his heart that his Savior could forgive him. He did not look upon the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God whose shed blood would cleanse him from all his sins, yes, even the sin of betrayal.

There lies the difference between Judas and Peter. Judas had no **GODLY SORROW** but only **WORLDLY SORROW**. Yes, he was truly sorry for what he had done, for his sin, but he had no idea of what to do with that sin. His guilt overwhelmed him. Satan had filled his heart and kept control of it. The results for Judas were eternal death and damnation, in unbelieving despair he killed himself.

No one can have eternal life without godly repentance. Godly sorrow over ones sins, acknowledging our miserable lost condition and then believing, trusting, looking to Jesus alone for full and free forgiveness. This is not a work of man, it is and can only be a work of God the Holy Spirit upon the heart.

Christian missionaries tell of the pitiful attempts of some heathen people to appease the wrath of their idol-gods by pretending to give them money. They would come before their idols and instead of real money they would lay down fake paper money. How foolish a deception to a man-made god of wood or stone. How much more foolish is it for us to imagine that we can in any way deceive the all-wise; all-knowing God who says; **I THE LORD SEARCH THE HEART AND EXAMINE THE MIND.**

May we all be led to a proper repentance of our sins and praise of our Savior who has come to redeem us from our sins. As we meditate upon our Savior's great sacrifice for us, His suffering and death upon the cross as our Sacrifice, may the Holy Spirit lead us to daily repentance, godly sorrow over our sins and a daily laying of those sins at the foot of the cross upon Christ. God's Word says to us, sinners all; **THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST HIS SON CLEANSSES US FROM ALL SIN. . . THOUGH YOUR SINS ARE LIKE SCARLET, THEY SHALL BE AS WHITE AS SNOW; THOUGH THEY ARE RED LIKE CRIMSON, THEY SHALL BE AS WOOL. . . I, EVEN I, AM HE WHO BLOTS OUT YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS FOR MY OWN SAKE; AND I WILL NOT REMEMBER YOUR SINS. . . HE HAS NOT DEALT WITH US ACCORDING TO OUR SINS, NOR PUNISHED US ACCORDING TO OUR INIQUITIES. FOR AS THE HEAVENS ARE HIGH ABOVE THE EARTH, SO GREAT IS HIS MERCY TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM; AS FAR AS THE EAST IS FROM**

THE WEST, SO FAR HAS HE REMOVED OUR TRANSGRESSIONS FROM US. . . IN HIM (CHRIST) WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE.

If Judas only would have remembered these words and believed them. May the Holy Spirit lead us into God's Word again and again so that we may never forget them but always believe that:
JESUS SINNERS DOTH RECEIVE.

**OH, HOW BLEST IT IS TO KNOW;
WERE AS SCARLET MY TRANSGRESSION,
IT SHALL BE AS WHITE AS SNOW
BY THY BLOOD AND BITTER PASSION;
FOR THESE WORDS I NOW BELIEVE;
JESUS SINNERS DOTH RECEIVE.**

Amen.