

**Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta**  
**“Come to Repentance” (2 Peter 3:8-9)**  
**December 6, 2020**  
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In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In the collect for this Second Sunday of Advent we are reminded of a central theme in Advent, reminded of the heart of the message of every single prophet of the Old Testament, reminded of the heart of the message of a primary prophet of the New Testament, John the Baptist: “Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach *repentance...*” (*The Book of Common Prayer* 211). Repentance was the message of every single Old Testament prophet, and repentance was the message of John the Baptist—as we read in today’s gospel passage: “John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4).

Repentance means making a U-turn. Repentance means turning away from the sin in your life and turning back to God. As we see in the baptism liturgy in *The Book of Common Prayer*, repentance means to “renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God”, to “renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God”, and to “renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God.” But renouncing the world, the flesh and the devil is only the first half of repentance—the second half is turning to Jesus Christ, putting “your whole trust in his grace and love”, and promising to follow and obey him as your Lord” (302-303).

Repent, make a U-turn, renounce the world and the flesh and the devil, and turn back to God. Put your whole trust in God’s grace and love—that is message of all the prophets in the Bible. Jesus himself, who was and is the Ultimate Prophet, also preached repentance: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near,” Jesus cried out, “repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15).

Repent. Do what the Christians in Thessalonica did when they heard the Apostle Paul preaching the gospel, as he wrote: “you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). This theme of repentance is also in today’s passage from the Second Letter of Peter:

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:8-9).

The Lord does not want anyone to perish. The Lord does not want anyone to languish in their sin. The Lord does not want anyone to be paid what the Apostle Paul referred to as “the wages of sin”—the paycheck from sin—which is death but rather to turn back to God and receive the free gift of God, which is “eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). The Lord wants “all to come to repentance”—including you.

I have always enjoyed the 1966 animated Christmas special, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* based on the 1957 Dr. Seuss book about the bitter Grinch’s efforts to ruin Christmas for all the Who’s in Whoville. Why? The narrator tells us:

Every Who down in Whoville liked Christmas a lot  
But the Grinch who lived just north of Whoville did not!  
The Grinch hated Christmas! The whole Christmas season!  
Now please don’t ask why, no one quite knows the reason.  
It could be perhaps that his shoes were too tight  
It could be head wasn’t screwed on just right.  
But I think that the most likely reason of all  
May have been that his heart was two sizes too small.

Later the narrator, Boris Karloff, sings these dark lyrics about the Grinch:

You nauseate me, Mr. Grinch, with a nauseous super “naus”!  
You’re a crooked dirty jockey and you drive a crooked hoss.  
Mr. Grinch! Your soul is an appalling dump heap overflowing with the  
most disgraceful assortment of rubbish imaginable mangled up in tangled up  
knots!  
You’re a foul one, Mr. Grinch. You’re a nasty-wasty skunk.  
Your heart is full of unwashed socks. Your soul is full of gunk.  
Mr. Grinch! The three words that best describe you are as follows  
And I quote, “Stink, stank, stunk”!

When it comes to repentance, this is a theological bullseye. The problem with the Grinch was in his heart. The reason the Grinch hated Christmas and wanted to ruin Christmas for all the Who's in Whoville was because indeed that "his heart was two sizes too small."

And when it comes to repentance it is the same for you and me. We can hear someone tell us to repent a thousand times, but if we have a hard heart, we will ignore that call to repentance again and again, a thousand times. We need God to change our heart, or to take it a step further, as King David wrote when he repented after his affair with Bathsheba and conspiring to have her husband Uriah killed, we need God to create in us a new heart (Psalm 51:10).

So what is the one thing that can change our heart so that we no longer ignore the Lord's call to repentance, the one thing that can change our heart so that we actually do make a U-turn and turn away from sin and turn back to God, the one thing that enables us to put our whole trust in God's grace and love? That one thing is the gospel—that God loves us unconditionally, the gospel that God loves us so much that in his death on the cross Jesus Christ took our sins upon himself and paid the wages of our sins—the paycheck for our sins—in our place.

Maybe your heart is as hard as the Grinch's. Maybe again and again you have somehow sensed the Lord calling you to repent about something in your life but again and again you have completely ignored that call to repentance. How does the Lord respond? Well, as we see in today's passage from the Second Letter of Peter, "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance."

The Lord not only loves you more than you could imagine, but is also more patient with you than you could imagine—because the Lord does not want you to perish but to come to repentance. Scripture tells us it is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). It is the life-changing realization that as the late Brennan Manning put it, "If I've learned anything about the world of grace, it's that failure is always a chance for a do-over" (*All is Grace* 162) and that "God loves you unconditionally, as you are and not as you should be, because nobody is as they should be" (192). When the truth of the gospel actually hits home in your heart, you just might want to come to repentance after all.

Repentance is a response to the gospel, the gospel that is always a word of comfort because it is based on the unconditional love of God, as Isaiah declared in today's Old Testament passage: "Comfort, O comfort my people says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid" (Isaiah 40:1-2). That is what happened on Good Friday when Jesus Christ the Son of God died in your place because God considers you worth dying for. Your term has been served; your penalty has been paid. It is that divine kindness, that divine patience, that divine love which enables you to come to repentance.

And what does such repentance look like? Well, back to the Grinch...on Christmas Eve he steals from Whoville all the trappings of Christmas—every tree, ornament, present, decoration, candy cane, all of it. And yet, Christmas morning all the Who's in Whoville joined hands and sang anyway, as the narrator puts it:

Every Who down in Whoville, the tall and the small  
Was singing without any presents at all!  
He hadn't stopped Christmas from coming! It came!  
Somehow or other, it came just the same!  
And the Grinch, with his grinch-feet ice-cold in the snow  
Stood puzzling and puzzling. "How could it be so?  
It came without ribbons! It came without tags!  
It came without packages, boxes, or bags!"  
He puzzled and puzzled till his puzzler was sore.  
Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before.  
Maybe Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store.  
Maybe Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more!  
And what happened then? Well, in Whoville they say  
That the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day!

The Grinch's heart that had been "two sizes too small" grew "three sizes that day" and the Grinch and gave back everything he had stolen. In other words, the Grinch had finally come to repentance. My prayer for you today is that the Holy Spirit will rekindle God's love anew in your heart, so that in whatever way the Lord may be calling you to repent, you will respond...and indeed come to repentance.

Amen.