

Isaiah 11:1-10
Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19
Romans 15:4-13
Matthew 3:1-12

Sermon December 4th, 2022

God's Forgiveness

John, and later Jesus, will preach a message that can sometimes be hard for us to hear. We are invited into a life of repentance, a life where we continually try to turn away from those thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours that make it more difficult for us to love God. To love our neighbours. Thoughts and beliefs that are sometimes so entrenched within us.

For example, some of our thoughts and beliefs about Indigenous people, Muslims, Jews, people of color, people in the LGBTQ community. Some of our thoughts and beliefs about these groups of people have been hurtful and harmful to these groups (**Image one:** someone from one of these groups).

We establish these thoughts, these beliefs often over a long period of time. Through what our parents and other trusted adults like political and religious leaders say about these groups of people. Through how we see these groups of people being portrayed in the media. News, movies, tv shows, social media platforms (**Image one:** someone from one of these groups). Through how are peers talk about these groups of people.

These thoughts, beliefs become entrenched within us. And they start shaping how we behave towards these groups of people. Making it harder for us to take up Jesus' invitation to love our neighbours as we love ourselves (**Image one:** someone from one of these groups).

This call to repentance isn't easy. Sometimes, we need to dig down deep inside of ourselves to change our thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours towards others. Sometimes it takes a lot of repenting before we feel like we are walking in a direction where we find ourselves loving our neighbour.

In our gospel this morning, John sees that this repentance is necessary if we are going to open our hearts to listen to what Jesus has to say. If we are going to be able to think, believe, and act like Jesus.

Whether it is listening to a Samaritan woman at a well. A woman who is there fetching water in the middle of the day, because her community has excluded her. A woman who is part of a group of people we were taught to stay away from. Or standing up for a woman who is facing death, because a group of men have judged her harshly. In a system of justice, we would see as unfair.

Whether it is healing a daughter of a Gentile soldier, an oppressor, because our compassionate heart says it's the right thing to do, or being amazed at the faith Jesus is seeing in the Gentile communities he travels to. Lifting this faith up for others to see. Affirming who they are and where they come from.

John calls us to repentance, Jesus calls us to repentance, because when we repent, when we turn away from those thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours that hurt our neighbours, then we are more able to embrace thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours that affirm our neighbours, that lift them up (**Image Two:** an image of coming together). That move us to love them.

In our gospel this morning, as a suffering people await the hope of a Messiah, John invites them to change their thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours. To not see this moment as a time to become more exclusive as God's chosen people, but as a time to embrace God's inclusive love to all people. To not see this moment as a time of vengeance over their oppressors, but as a time to love their neighbours. Not just those neighbours they see in their own ethnic community. But all their neighbours. Gentiles and Jews. Slaves and free. Males and Females and Non-Binaries. Muslims and Indigenous people. People of color. People who have differing perspectives on pressing issues. We are invited to love all our neighbours (**Image Two:** an image of coming together).

And the first step is to repent, to welcome God's gracious love into our hearts. So, to, bear witness to God changing us into people who love God and love all our neighbours.

Martin Luther preached passionately about Christ's call to repentance. He believed we needed to repent daily. Believing that this repentance changes us into the people God calls us to be. People whose thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours are shaped by Christ's love for us.

This call to repentance also reassures us that God is a gracious God who is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. God welcomes our repentance wherever we are. Whether in a church sanctuary or in front of our device or at our bedside or at a coffee shop in front of someone we hurt.

God always gives us a chance to change our direction away from those thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours that are hurtful, and turn our attention towards those thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours that reflect Christ's love (**Image Two:** an image of coming together).

We see this repentant work taking place in the church as we work towards truth and reconciliation with our indigenous neighbours. We see this repentant work taking place in the church as we work towards creating a more inclusive community that welcomes people that we once excluded from opportunities to lead, to serve, to be part of our

community. We see this repentant work taking place in the church as we invest more time and energy in learning about our Muslim and Jewish neighbours.

God is a gracious God who is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. God is a God who listens to our repentance, wherever we are, and forgives us. Changing our hearts. Preparing us to follow Christ. To love God and our neighbours as Christ loves us.

Let us pray, gracious God help us change those thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours that have hurt our neighbours. Through this repentance, open our ears to hear your voice of forgiveness, and your call to think, believe, and behave in ways that reflect your love. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

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