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## Jesus said, 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.'

(Matthew 4:17).

Jesus began his ministry with the word 'Repent'. He was offering good news: responding to the deepest cry in any human heart for new life against the odds.

Repentance can seem like a technical, special way for keen Christians to deal with sin. But repentance is not an anguished saying sorry, though sometimes we feel the need for this; nor is it a special, churchy discipline to deal with besetting sins and fine-tune our behaviour to become ever more perfect. Rather, repentance means turning and seeing things differently, from another standpoint; it means accepting God's judgement on selfishness and disobedience as an encounter with his faithfulness and love.

In our seeking for God, our relationships with others, our understanding of ourselves, we are liable to develop two traits which handicap us from becoming more fully the person God created us to be:

- One is to settle for what's comfortable and familiar and peaceful; to become complacent and so less open to the new life and possibilities God longs to offer as blessings for us.
- The other is to see God, other people, and ourselves in terms of our own selfish perspectives: putting ourselves at the centre and God and others on the margins.

'Jesus is not condemning a sinful world, or us in the sins we need to confront, but issuing a rich invitation to see things differently, more broadly.'

According to St Augustine, the desire of the self to preserve and develop itself on its own terms is the basis of human sinfulness. Jesus' call to repent is a call to find our real self by seeking forgiveness and being changed, in order to receive a new and therefore different life. It is an offer of the good news that we can

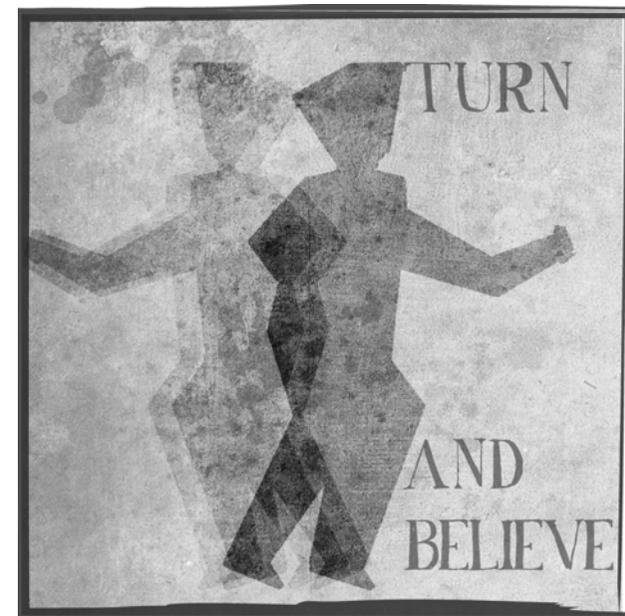
dare to have the courage to turn and see things from God's angle.

Jesus is not condemning a sinful world, or us in the sins we need to confront, but issuing a rich invitation to see things differently, more broadly. As he grows in us a richer spirit of wholeness and holiness, all that we find difficult is put in a new light of hopefulness. As well, by turning to see things from God's perspective, and opening ourselves to the broader possibilities for our lives he offers, we allow goodness and grace to grow, in us, through us, around us.

Such a perspective is developed through serious engagement with scripture; through worship and prayer; through trying to follow Jesus more closely; through owning our own weaknesses, failings, and limitations. Repentance may be focussed in particular moments of prayer and confession, but most properly these reflect a way of living, an openness to turning

round and seeing more fully. Repentance is a step of faith into a new future.

If you take time to come into church to pray or reflect on the teachings in the Bible, such moments can highlight the good news God longs to offer. We need to recognize where we are now, the good and the bad, and to trust that in God's mercy and grace we can receive the courage to see with new eyes – eyes of hope and expectation – the vision of love that binds us to a God of love.



'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand' is a call to turn our hearts and cry out to the listening heart of God, an invitation to grow in holiness: the wholeness we thought was beyond our reach, the new and renewed life God desires for us.

'The **time** is fulfilled,  
and the  
**kingdom of God**  
has **come near**;  
repent, and believe in the  
**good news.**'

Mark 1: 15 NRSV

**Further Reading**

Gospel Imprint, *Becoming Who I Am*

Gospel Imprint, *Confession*

Henri Nouwen, *Return of the Prodigal Son*

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**Repentance**  
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