

You Have Every Reason in the World to Repent

Joel 2:12-19

Ash Wednesday, February 17, 2010

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Return to the Lord, your God. Return to Him with fasting and with weeping and with mourning. Be sorry and don't just say that you are sorry. Be really sorry. And God will know. Do not merely come to church. Come to the Lord, your God.

You have every reason in the world to return to the Lord, Your God.

He is gracious. He is compassionate. He is long of temper. He is not short tempered. He is long tempered. He does not wack you immediately for every little wrong thing that you do. Just look at the wicked. They do all kinds of wicked things and they get away with it. The Lord, your God, does not wack them immediately upon every little infraction of His commandments. My land, He does not even wack them in regards to big infractions of His commandments. If He lets the wicked off of the hook for sins, He will let you off of the hook for sins.

If the Lord, your God, wacked you for every little thing that you did, if He made sure that every sin was punished in due measure, then there would not be any of us alive. We would be one big mass of bodies on planet earth. There would not even be anyone left to bury the bodies.

But the Lord is long tempered, not short tempered. He is gracious and compassionate. He is slow to anger. Return to Him. Return to Him because it is safe to return to Him. He has made it so.

The Lord is great in His covenant faithfulness. He will remain faithful to the cross of His Son Jesus Christ. That is to say, when a sinner repents, the Lord, your God, will forgive that sinner. The reason is not because the sinner earned forgiveness by his or her repentance. The reason that God forgives is because He is faithful to the cross of His Son, Jesus Christ. If He is faithful to the cross of His Son, Jesus Christ, you have nothing to fear. Repent! Return to the Lord, your God.

The Lord is faithful to your Baptism. He will not be unfaithful to your Baptism. Let God be true and every man a liar. God is true and every man is a liar. He is the One who does what He says. He is faithful to your Baptism. What benefits does Baptism give? It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this as the words and promises of God declare. If that is the case, return to the Lord, your God. He is faithful to the covenant that He made with you.

He is faithful to the Sacrament of the Altar. He says that it is for your forgiveness and so it is for your forgiveness. Return to the Lord your God. He is faithful. You have every reason in the world to return to the Lord your God.

If you repent, He will repent. If you repent of your sins, He will repent of the evil that He is planning to bring upon you. He will repent of hell.

Even if you don't believe me when I tell you that God is faithful to the cross of His Son, you may as well give it a shot. What could it hurt? You may as well repent. After all there is not advantage in leading a sinful life even in this life. You may as well repent.

Even if you have your doubts about how God has treated you, that is ok, repent anyway. Even if you are uncertain that you can change God's attitude, try repentance anyway and see what happens. It is not like it is going to hurt you or anything.

Perhaps God will bless you. Perhaps God will leave you a blessing. Perhaps God will leave you with such a large blessing that you will have enough left over to give some back to Him. Give it a shot. Try it out. What could it hurt? Return to the Lord, your God.

And to that end we have called this worship service. To that end we observe the season of Lent. To that end we set aside Ash Wednesday. To that end we confess our sins corporately in worship and individually with the pastor. To that end we are wearing ash crosses on our foreheads.

Returning to the Lord, your God, is for everybody. It is for the elderly and for the young. If you are elderly and are putting off repentance, put it off no longer. It is more important that you repent, than to wait on whatever it is that you are waiting for before you repent. Besides in most people's lives whatever it is that you are waiting for is never going to come until you repent anyway, so you may as well repent now. Do not wait until you are tired of the sin. Do not wait until it does not serve you any more. Do not wait for some arbitrary time set by yourself when you think you will be prepared to repent. Repent now. Repentance is for the elderly.

It is also for the young. The young often believe that they have not done anything wrong. That is unfortunate. They need to read the commandments again. They need to consider their place in life according to the Ten Commandments again. Repent! Do not wait until you are old to repent. Do not wait until you are in college to repent. It will get even harder to repent at college. Do not wait until you have a job to repent. And do not wait until you have children to repent. For as far as your children are concerned if you wait until you have children to repent you have waited too long.

It is for the very young. It is for those who nurse at the breasts. Do not wait until your children can make up their own minds on whether or not they want to repent. God Himself allowed Adam and Eve to make up their own minds and we all know the choice they made. We are born in their image and according to their likeness. Do not wait until your children can make up their own minds to determine whether or not they are going to be baptized. Do not wait until your children can make up their own mind whether or not they are going to read or hear the Word of God. Do you let them make up their own minds on good nutrition? Do you let them make up their own minds on whether or not they will get an education? Sometimes we do let our children make up their own minds about their own nutrition. And look at obesity in the United States. Repentance is for the young. Get it to them now. Do not delay. You have every reason to give your children repentance.

It is for brides and grooms. Suppose you had a choice between attending an Ash Wednesday service and attending your own wedding. I know that we are all smart enough to schedule those two things on different days. But suppose they were on the same day. Which would you pick? And this question assumes that if you go to your own wedding you will genuinely be married. If you go to the Ash Wednesday service you will genuinely repent. Which would you choose? We are all now caught between what we know God would want us to say and what we would really say given that choice.

When you take wedding vows it is until death parts you. Once one of you dies, the marriage is over. There is no marriage at the resurrection. You do not stay married forever in spite of what country music may have told you.

When God makes covenants over the cross of His Son Jesus Christ, those covenants are eternal ones. They last forever. His promises of grace, compassion, being long tempered, etc., they all last forever. With them you live forever. Without them is everlasting damnation. Which would you attend? Your wedding or the Ash Wednesday service?

Let Jesus weep. Let Jesus weep over you. Let Jesus weep over you at the right hand of the Father. Let Him say to the Father, "Take pity on Your people." Let Jesus say to the Father, "Do not give Your inheritance as a reproach. Do not give Your inheritance as a byword among the people." Let Jesus ask the Father, "Why should they say among the nations, 'Where is their God?'"

We want Jesus to do these things. Jesus reminds the Father that His reputation is at stake when it comes to the everlasting fate of His people. If we all wind up in hell, then the nations who are in hell with us are going to ask, "Where was your God?" What Jesus does is remind the Father, "Do you really want the nations in hell to say that to Your people?"

And so the Father is jealous for His people. He doesn't want anyone to stand around and ask us where our God is at. He wants everyone to know that He is with us. And so the Father has spared you. The Father has answered and said to His people, "Now I am sending you eternity. You will be satisfied with eternity. I will not give you again to be a reproach to others."

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.