

Dear members and friends of St. John Lutheran,

Last month, the topic of my article was *saving faith*. We said that faith in Christ at the time of our death, is absolutely essential for our entrance into heaven. **This month, we shift to another critical aspect of our Christian life: repentance.** Why? Jesus, Himself, directs His disciples to go out and teach "*repentance and forgiveness of sins*" to the whole world (Luke 24:45-48). Since Jesus commands this be done, *repentance* should be well understood by all of His disciples, including you and me.

Let's begin by understanding that there are **two distinct types of repentance**. Prior to a person being saved (being brought to faith in Jesus Christ), a **conversion must take place**. The Old Adam, man's sinful human nature, is dominating the unbeliever's thoughts and actions. The world and Satan easily lead this unconverted person to accomplish things that are in opposition to God's will. This is where the application of God's Law is critical. When confronted by the truth of God's Law, the unconverted person is brought low. He cannot escape the truth about the reality of his life – he is **not** a "good person." **Then**, as the message of forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ is presented to him, he is **changed**, in the blink of an eye – **to be a faithful follower of Jesus** (see Romans 1:16-17 and 10:17). The heart and mind are affected! This is **strictly God's work** to bring us to saving faith. **Man contributes nothing!** (see Jeremiah 31:18, John 6:44). It's **not a process** – something that takes time and effort; **it's instantaneous!** The believer did nothing, nor did he show some form of worthiness in his life. By God's grace and mercy, we are brought to saving faith! (This conversion may also take place through God's action in **Baptism** – when a **child** is too young to understand the truth about his sin. Adults are led to repentance through instruction, and then are marked by our Lord in Holy Baptism).

The ***second type of repentance*** is a recurring work (daily, even hourly), in the life of a **Christian**, where **man can and does contribute**. Note that this second form of repentance **cannot contribute to our salvation** – that "work" was already **accomplished for us by God**, in the **first, or initial, act of repentance**. Even here, God's Spirit is active in leading us. In this daily (even hourly) work in us, the Holy Spirit helps us to see our sin clearly. We say, think, do, or leave undone something that the Law of God either prohibits or demands of us. We have violated our Lord's Word. Our conscience bears witness to our failure.

At this point, **the Christian has the option** of allowing God to work in him, leading him to confess that sin (or sins) and to seek God's help to turn from it; **or, the Christian may choose to ignore God's leading**, and simply **live with sin**. **The second option, ignoring God's call to change, is dangerous.** Dr. Martin Luther states that it is dangerous to go against your conscience. If one continues down this path, **God's Holy Spirit will flee the Christian who rejects the Spirit's leading**. This person is seeking a life that is free from God's input and guidance. And God will grant it.

However, **when, with a sorrowful heart, the Christian confesses his sins before God and others**, and **seeks God's strength to turn from sin, God is active and willing to help**. God is always faithful! Confessing your sins in church is **not** a "good work" that **leads God** to forgive you! **Faith in Jesus Christ is a 'blanket of grace' that covers you**, and provides complete forgiveness of sins (even *before* you are led to confess your sins).

In effect, **confession flows from us** (with help of the Holy Spirit) as we seek our Lord's presence. Then, God uses the message of forgiveness, found in His Gospel, to change your heart and mind. They're being changed, so that your thoughts, words, and deeds are more like your Lord's. This growing in Christ is called **sanctification** (see Ephesians 4:11-16, Hebrews 2:10-12, 2 Corinthians 3:16-18, Romans 12:2).

The **process of sanctification** (a lifelong process) **does not** mean that each day you will be more reliant on your Lord. It **does not** mean that each day you will **grow** in your holiness. **Sanctification is a process that can mean one step forward, and two steps back.** Daily repentance turns us back to our Lord, and His Word and Sacraments. Reconnected to your Lord, His Word and His Supper are used by Him to grow you to be more like His Son. **Unconfessed sin** (or that pet sin that you're so fond of keeping) **can pull you back**, returning you closer to **your original state** - that fallen state that existed prior to your faith in Jesus (see Psalm 32:3-5). **Separating yourself from worship and God's Word** will cause sin to be more prevalent in your life, as you wither and die spiritually (see John 15:5-8).

Jesus' command, that you reach-out to the lost with the message of "repentance and forgiveness of sins," certainly begins with **His initial act of repentance in us: conversion.** **But forgiveness of sins only continues through a life of daily repentance.** God is at work in us. As we abide in our Lord, and He in us, the 'blanket of forgiveness' continues to cover us. Our faith is strengthened. We remain in spiritual communion (Word and Sacrament) with Him.

That's the daily life of a Christian. Notice that it's **not a life free of sin.** Not at all. It is, however, God's active work in us to **keep us on the narrow road that leads to heaven** (Matthew 7:13-14). Our life in Christ begins with repentance, and it continues with repentance – until we see Him face-to-face. Amen.

Pastor Travis

P.S. One final comment on *repentance*. There are **two senses** of the word *repentance*, found in your Bible. In some verses, *repentance* has a narrow meaning, referring to the Law of God leading a person to the *state of contrition* (a heartfelt sorrow over defying God's will). In other verses, it may be referring to *repentance* in the wide-sense: being brought low by God's Law, leading to confession **and** the renewal that comes from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

For example, in the Luke 24 text used in the beginning of this article, *repentance* is used in the **narrow sense** of its meaning (see also Acts 5:31, 11:18, 2 Cor. 7:10, Mark 1:15 – and many others). For the Scriptural use of repent or repentance in the **wide sense**, see Hebrews 6:6, 2 Peter 3:9, Revelation 2:5 (and many others). Keep this in mind as you read your Bible.