

TURN AROUND!
Acts 3:12-21
Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri
April 15, 2018

LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/turn-around/>

On Easter Sunday, two weeks ago, we listened in on one of the earliest recorded sermons after Jesus' resurrection. Here is a second post-resurrection sermon. Simon Peter names the key to coming to Christ and to following Christ. He says we must repent, or turn around, or as the CEB phrases it, "change your hearts and live" (v. 19).

In order to turn around from ignoring God to trusting God, we must know something about God. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v. 13). In other words, God is personal. He knows our names. And He has a plan for us. Are you going to ignore such a God or turn and come to this God?

Next, Simon Peter says, in order to turn from ignoring to trusting, to repent, we need to know something about Jesus Christ. Look at all the names for Jesus which Peter mentions in this sermon: servant/child (v. 13); Holy and Righteous One (v. 14); Author of Life (v. 15); Messiah/Anointed One (v. 18). Note the dripping irony in v. 14. When the crowd was given a choice of letting Jesus go free or a criminal named Barabbas, they chose Barabbas! And note the further irony in v. 15. They killed the Author of Life! If you have a heart for justice in this world, if you are one of those tender people who get angry or tearful when you see something that isn't fair, look at this. Peter says an awareness of this injustice could lead us to turn around, to repent.

But if this is so, why don't we turn around, toward God and Christ? Martin Luther wrote that many things can keep us from God. Success, wealth, status, self-love. In 21st century language, we would say control issues keep us from Christ. And I might add these things which keep us from repenting: shame (not good enough), self-sufficiency (good enough as I am) and distraction with life's tiny stuff. We have to be in charge! Imagine entering a room through a very low, small door. We have to get on our knees and unload all our junk. That's what it means to come to Christ. Peter says our sins our sins will be wiped away. God hits the delete button. The word for "wipe away" means to smear out, rub out. In the first century, they wrote on parchment or a wax tablet which they had to reuse, so with some oil based cloth, they would rub out the writing until it disappeared.

But repentance isn't just for those who are coming to Christ for the first time. Much of the New Testament discussion of repentance is for believers. My seminary professor, Dr. Morris Ashcraft, explained it this way: imagine a navy ship out to sea, receiving new orders, to return to port. It must turn around, dramatically, 180 degrees. But after it has done so it must continually do small but important course corrections, lest the current drive it off course. So we must develop a lifestyle of repentance, lest we drift. I don't know what things push you off course, but you do. Gossip, lust, ugly attitude, jealousy, a wicked tongue, selfishness, lack of love.

During a children's time in one church, the leader asked, "What should we do when we mess up and sin?" Of course, she was looking for the answer, "Confess," or "say you're sorry." But one little girl blurted out, "Stop it!" She was right! Stop it! Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance" [*The Cost of*

Discipleship, p. 47]. Cheap grace—just come on down and get your free Jesus prize!

And by the way, someone has suggested another way to translate the New Testament word repent: "to go beyond the mind you have" [Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, p. 180]. To see things in a brand, new way. If your mind has been shaped by culture and its values, you repent of that and turn to the Kingdom of God. If your mind is shaped by your peers, your ambition, your ego, to repent and turn. Brian McLaren writes, "Repentance is more than being sorry; it's being different."

When I was a senior in high school, I took a class entitled aviation science taught by Mr. Moyer, our science and math teacher, who was a pilot. I'll always remember something he said. "An airplane does not have a reverse. But you can always turn around and go back home." Life does not have a reverse. Those regrets? That shame and embarrassment about the past? There is no undoing it. Life doesn't have a reverse. We can't go back and relive it. But God can wipe it away. And you can come home. Always. Turn around and come to the Kingdom. Turn around and come home.