

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday ordinary Time, A

**“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,”** Jesus says in today’s gospel.

How is that working for you? Who here has repented today? Did anyone repent over the weekend? How about over the past week? Is anyone thinking about repenting?

If you were going to think about repenting, what do you imagine it would mean and look like for you to repent? What is Jesus asking for?

My sense is that most of us don’t really understand repentance. I suspect that most of us have been told or have come to believe that repentance is a negative thing. It is about us having done something wrong or bad. It is about our misbehavior.

For a good part of my life, that is how I understood repentance. Repentance was about changing from bad to good, shaping up or shipping out, turning or burning, flying straight. Maybe that or something like that has been your understanding, too.

That understanding of repentance makes our behavior the central issue and puts us on a course of always trying to be good enough. That’s a difficult and exhausting way to live, whether we are doing it for Jesus, our spouse, our parents, or anyone else.

While I am all in favor of good behavior, I don’t think that’s what Jesus is talking about in today’s gospel. It is too small. It doesn’t enlarge life. It

is just another way of saying, “**Stop. Cut it out. Don’t do that.**” It doesn’t call us to anything new.

What if repentance is really a call to something new? That fits today’s gospel. Isn’t that what we see happening when Jesus calls Andrew and Peter, and James and John? Matthew doesn’t describe any bad behavior on their part. Jesus doesn’t criticize their behavior or accuse them of wrongdoing. They are fisherman doing the fisherman thing – casting nets, mending nets, sailing little boats on the Sea of Galilee, making a living.

Jesus sees them and says, “**Follow me.**” He could just as well have said, “**Repent.**” And they do. Peter and Andrew leave their nets. James and John leave their boat and their father. They are stepping into a larger life. Their life will be larger than a boat on the Sea of Galilee. Their catch, the content of their lives, will be more than their nets can hold. They won’t stop fishing; they will now fish for people. They won’t stop being who they are; they will more fully become who they already are, fisherman. What if that is repentance?

Haven’t you sometimes wanted or needed a larger life? Haven’t there been times when you needed renewal in your life? Haven’t you sometimes wanted to exchange your small life for a larger one? Maybe repentance is a process of growing up and becoming more truly ourselves. Maybe repentance isn’t about our having been bad but about having outgrown our lives as they are.

The psychologist Carl Jung says that we all walk in “**shoes too small**” for us. You know what that’s like, right? You stuff your foot into a shoe or boot that’s too small. There is more foot than shoe. It doesn’t matter how cute the shoe is; it still hurts. It constricts. Toenails bruise. Blisters form. And it is hard and painful to walk.

Sometimes the shoe of our life is just too small. Sometimes our life is constricted by the same old patterns of seeing, thinking, and behaving. We have always done it that way, and we cannot imagine doing it any other way. Repent. Sometimes we let our past and history, our wounds and our fears keep our lives small. We play it safe and push aside our dreams of something more. Repent. Sometimes we accept bruises and blisters as just the way it is. It is familiar, and we know what to expect. We are comfortably uncomfortable. Repent.

If we want to get somewhere new in life, we might need to leave the place we are now. If we want to see something new, it might help to look in a different direction. If we want to hold something new or different, we might need to let go of what is already in our hands.

Maybe it is time to take off our old shoes. Maybe it is time to be like Peter and Andrew and leave our nets. Maybe it is time to be like James and John and leave our boat and Zebedee.

Let’s not literalize the shoes, nets, boats, or Zebedee. They are symbols and images descriptive of our lives, and they are the doorway to our growth.

In what ways are you walking in shoes too small for your feet? What shoes are constricting your life today? And what would it be like and mean for you to kick them off? What is the next larger size shoe for you?

What are the nets in your life? What things or relationships are trapping and entangling you today? What patterns, habits, or beliefs have snared and captured you? And why do we spend so much time mending the nets that entangle us rather than dropping them? What nets do you need to leave behind today, and what would that take?

What are the little boats that contain your life and keep it small? Sometimes our boats can become illusions of control, security, or self-sufficiency. What fears keep you from getting out of the boat? In what ways do the routines, familiarity, and comfort of your little boat keep you sailing the same old waters of life? What would it take for you to get out of and walk away from that boat?

Who is old Zebedee in your life? In what ways are you waiting for or depending on Zebedee to give you an identity, value, and meaning for your life? From whom are you continually seeking approval? How are Zebedee's expectations of who you should be and what you should be doing governing your life? What if you thanked Zebedee for what he or she has given and done for you, and then stepped out of the boat? What would it be like to walk away from old Zebedee and reclaim yourself and your life?

Have you ever thought of repentance in those ways? Each of them is a letting go, an exchanging of what is for what might be.

Maybe repentance is less about where we have been and more about where we are going. Maybe it is less about what we have done or left undone and more about who we are becoming. Maybe repentance is less about our past and more about our future.

**My Dear Brothers and Sisters,**

What if that's how we understood and practiced repentance? If that's what repentance is like, what will your repentance be this afternoon? What's the next larger size life for you today?

Repent, not because you have been bad, but because you are worth it.

**Amen.**