

REPENT – COME HOME TO GOD

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

It is a fascinating thing to me how some words and concepts get stuck with their negative meaning, until their essence is all but lost. After all, few things are negative in and of themselves. We have to take a thing to the worst end of its spectrum of possibility to get its negative. This comes from the fact that God is the Creator, and all things are created good. Satan corrupts, tells lies, brings aberration and twisting and misapplication. But Satan is no Creator, only the corrupter.

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” How I love that phrase. Like a great, soothing hand of calmness and hope and comfort, it comes to light my way, to lift my load, to remind me: Oh yes! I do not have to keep going down this impossible path, beating my head against the walls, frightening myself with visions of doom and disaster that might one day actually be real or final. I can repent ... turn again toward the Kingdom ... head for home. No matter how many times I have turned toward the Kingdom, every new time is a new delight.

I don't know why I so frequently need the reminder. Perhaps it is some spiritual counterpart to the earth's gravity – this magnetic, hypnotic pull toward the self-absorption, fear, and chaos of trying to live life according to human wisdom and pride and greed – and then make up for it awhile by trying to live according to human generosity, selflessness, and the latest new theory.

Only, I don't have to get over it once and for all. That was part of the old aberration. If, each time I learned, I thought it meant I had learned once and for all, that only made it hard to notice the pull of gravity. To be convinced that I'm on the right course makes it hard to repent – to turn. But the turning toward the Kingdom is a daily affair, an hourly affair, a constant refreshing of time and life. *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* Oh thank God! I get to adjust my course back toward God. And it always feels so good, so pleasant and right ... at least within. Such a relief. How wonderful, in an often dark world, to be reminded that we can head for the light.

So everybody, everywhere, loves to hear the marvelous phrase: “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” Not quite true, is it? And I would not try to pretend that I have always loved the phrase myself. So much of my life I have doubted God’s grace and mercy. I didn’t really mean to; it was almost as if I were born that way. And that put great pressure on the need to already be on the right course – to already be aimed in the right direction – down almost to the last small detail. “Repent” only reminded me that it was not true. “Repent” seemed like an accusation. “Repent” was bad news, as if I were a failure or something. A failure for not being perfectly in tune with the omniscient, omnipotent God? Who do I think I am?! WHERE do I think I am? How could a mere mortal be insulted at the reminder to head for the open arms ... to turn toward the guidance ... to realign all efforts here to a Kingdom of peace and love? Hard to believe I could ever have resented repentance! But my memory banks are not entirely gone. I remember, very distinctly, that I did.

Sometimes the resentment and the negative twist have obscured the most incredible part of that wonderful calling: “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” When we finally realize that “repent” is really Abba calling us toward home, then that other part of the phrase zooms into focus. Could it be true? Could we ever really live as if we knew and believed it to be true? “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” The closest most of our forebears, traditions, and creeds have ever proclaimed it is that “it is coming soon” – it’s not here, not yet, not at hand ... but coming soon. Oh, undoubtedly we have tried to straddle the fence a little. His “presence” is around here somewhere. We can pray; get a little comfort; learn to endure how we are, and how things are here, for a little longer. But He is not really here ... He is coming soon.

John the Baptist really thought the Kingdom was at hand. After centuries of waiting, he believed he lived in the actual time – that he had seen and met the Messiah. “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” John died – more accurately, he was murdered – before he saw how the Messiah was going to handle things. Many followers had their hopes dashed to earth by the Crucifixion. Only a handful in each generation has actually tracked it into the Resurrection. Oh yes, it’s part of what we are *supposed* to believe, but it’s not part of our lives – it’s not part of what we *really* believe. He is risen! He is here! No more waiting! THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND.

John the Baptist was right. If Jesus is here, the Kingdom is here. But John did not fathom – could not have fathomed – the magnitude of how right he was. And lots of days we do not either. But we cannot really straddle that fence without turning the whole business into a paltry game, a sophistry, a mere human religion that is one part light from the past, and three parts wishful thinking. If Jesus is here, the Kingdom is here. If Jesus is not here, it's only time to *get ready* to repent – not time *to repent*. WE CAN ONLY REPENT IF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND – that is, if we can walk into it, and love it, and live for it now.

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Our aversion to repentance is the most telling proof of our need to repent. Our aversion to repentance is also our fear and doubt that the Kingdom is not really at hand – that Jesus is not really here with us. So instead of repenting, we want to wait a little longer ... wait for Him to come again ... stay the way we are a little longer. What a waste of time and life.