

Repentance and Forgiveness: a Lenten Meditation in 7 voices

King Josiah - God's Word Shows Us the Way to Repentance

When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes. (2 Kings 22:11)

Not long after I had ordered repairs of the temple, the high priest Hilkiah found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord. It was brought to me and I read the words of the book. Then I realized that the people had not been obeying God's Law. I was convicted of my sin. I tore my clothes in an act of repentance. The Lord, the God of Israel, recognized that my heart was penitent. He spared me from living to see the destruction that would come upon Israel. (2Kings 22: 19-20)

When we read the Bible, we too are convicted of our sin. Being in the Word also shows us the way to repentance. King Josiah's humble, penitent heart is an example for us. God's response to our repentance is that we are spared from destruction in hell, because of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Prayer: We pray that we will remain in your Word. Give us repentant and humble hearts. Reassure us with your love and forgiveness, because of Jesus.

Nathan Has a Talk with David - Trusted People Can Lead Us to Repentance

"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." (Psalm 51:4)

One day Nathan, a prophet of God and a royal counselor, came to visit me with the story of a great injustice. He told me the story of a rich man, with many flocks who took the one ewe of a poor man to prepare a meal for his guest. I reacted with anger toward the rich man. I told Nathan, *"As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."* (2 Samuel 12:5-6) Nathan said to me, *"You are the man!"* (2 Samuel 12:7a) I told Nathan, *"I have sinned against the Lord."* (2 Samuel 12:13a) Yes, I had committed adultery with Bathsheba. Then I plotted to have her husband killed in battle. Nathan said to me, *"The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die."* (2 Samuel 12:13b-14) I was forgiven, but still faced the consequence for my sin. I responded with, *"Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!"* (Psalm 51:2)

It is always easier for us to see the sin of others and ignore our own sin, but God uses people in our lives to convict us of our sins and bring us to repentance.

Prayer: Thank you for trusted friends and pastors who can lead us to repent of our sins. Give us a willingness to acknowledge our sins and truly repent of them.

The Woman Caught in Adultery – We Are All Sinners

And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." (John 8:11b)

Again the scribes and Pharisees tested Jesus. While Jesus was teaching a group of people, I was brought into the midst of the group, because I had been caught in the act of adultery. The scribes and Pharisees reminded Jesus that the Law of Moses commanded I be stoned; and then asked for his opinion. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. Then, he stood up and addressed them, *“Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”* (John 8:7b) Again, Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground, just as judges sometimes wrote down their sentence before pronouncing it. Jesus’ words convicted my accusers of their own sin. This was too much for their consciences and none of them could throw the first stone at me. Their response was to walk away one by one. Now Jesus was left alone with me. *Jesus stood up and said to me, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” I said, “No one, Lord.”* (John 8:10, 11) My compassionate and forgiving Lord told me, *“Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”* (John 8:11b)

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for being a compassionate and forgiving God. With you as our example, help us forgive others in Jesus’ name.

A Sinful Woman Forgiven - Repentance Means Trusting in Jesus’ Mercy

Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.” (Luke 7:44)

I am a sinful woman. Many people did not want to be seen with me, but somehow I felt that Jesus was different. Jesus was dining at the home of Simon, a Pharisee, when I came to Him weeping. With my tears I wet his feet and wiped them with my hair. Then I kissed his feet and anointed them with ointment. Despite my sinfulness, I trusted that Jesus would show mercy to me. Then Jesus said to me, *“Your sins are forgiven”* (Luke 7:48) followed by *“Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”* (Luke 7:50) I am so grateful to Jesus that He could forgive even a sinner like me.

Our sins are never too great for Jesus mercy, forgiveness, and peaceful reassurance.

Prayer: Thank you for forgiving sins no matter how great they are. Grant us faith to trust in your mercy and to respond with penitent and grateful hearts.

Jesus Visits Zacchaeus - Repentance and Forgiveness Results in Changed Behavior

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10)

Jesus was passing through Jericho. I am a tax collector, but I wanted to see Jesus. Since I am short, I decided to run ahead and climb into a sycamore tree. Jesus knew to look up and found me in the tree. Then he invited himself to my house, *“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.”* (Luke 19:5b) Others grumbled that Jesus was going to the house of a sinner, but Jesus’ acceptance of me was a life-changing event for me. I received Jesus joyfully, saying, *“Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”* (Luke 19:8)

When we repent, God forgives us. With forgiveness, God helps us change our sinful behavior. Forgiveness results in salvation. *"Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."* (Luke 19:10) The lost was not only found, but saved.

Prayer: Change our hearts, so that we are truly sorry for our sins. Grant that your forgiveness results in life- changing behavior. Thank you for finding us and saving us through Jesus death and resurrection.

The Woman at the Well - Repentance and Forgiveness Frees Us to Tell Others

"Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" (John 4:29)

I met Jesus at Jacob's well. He asked me for water. I was surprised that a Jew was asking me a Samaritan woman for water. Then Jesus surprised me with these words, *"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you should have asked him, and he would have given you living water."* (John 4:10) When Jesus asked me to go get my husband, I admitted that I had no husband. He told me that he knew this and much more about my life. He knew my sins. I confessed, *"I know that the Messiah is coming and that he will tell us all things."* (John 4:25) Then, Jesus told me, *"I who speak to you am he"*. (John 4:26) I believed in him and I went to tell the other people in my town about Jesus. Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of my testimony, *"He told me all that I ever did."* (John 4:39)

Prayer: You know all of the sins that we have done and will do, yet you are willing to be our Messiah and provide us with living water. Help us to share this Good News with others.

Peter Denies Jesus - Jesus' Forgiveness is Ongoing

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven." (Matthew 18:21-22)

I told Jesus, *"I will lay down my life for you."* (John 13:37), Jesus foretold that I would deny him. Jesus asked me, *"Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times."* (John 13:38) After Jesus was arrested, I found myself in the court of the high priest. A servant girl recognized me as a disciple of Jesus. Servants and officers warming themselves in the courtyard asked me if I was a disciple. One of the servants of the high priest thought he had seen me in the garden with Jesus. Each time, three times, I denied knowing Jesus. As Jesus predicted, the rooster crowed after the third denial. (John 18:15-18, 25-27) That triggered my repentance. And I remembered the saying of Jesus, *"Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."* I went out and wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:75)

Jesus did not give up on Peter. Instead he recruited him to follow in his footsteps. He asked Peter three times whether he loved him; and then three times asked him to “*Feed my lambs...Tend my sheep...Feed my sheep.*” (John 21:15-19) And with that, Peter was forgiven and restored.

Prayer: Dear Father in Heaven, we thank you that you forgive us for Jesus’ sake, as you forgave Peter. Help us to forgive others as you forgive. Make us mindful that repentance and forgiveness is ongoing.

All scripture is from The Lutheran Study Bible ESV, c2009

Colleen Spahr, 2013