

**Sermon: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany**  
**Theme: Repentance- A Cross-Change**  
**Text: Matthew 4:12-23**

**<sup>12</sup> When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. <sup>13</sup> Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali – <sup>14</sup> to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah:**

**<sup>15</sup> ‘Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – <sup>16</sup> the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.’**

**<sup>17</sup> From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’**

**<sup>18</sup> As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’ <sup>20</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him.**

**<sup>21</sup> Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, <sup>22</sup> and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.**

**<sup>23</sup> Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and illness among the people.**

Experts say that the effects of COVID-19 have seen a decade of change compressed into three years. Many of us have become familiar with technology like Zoom, as a way of staying connected with family and friends. Online retailers have gone from strength. The first two years of COVID-19, and the restrictions that went with this, meant that we all stayed at home much more than normal. Some of us pivoted to working from home, and others of us may have had extra time to ponder the big questions. Am I happy with my life, my work, where I’m living?

Some people answered these questions in the negative. They left jobs they didn’t like, known as the great resignation. Others stayed with the same organisation, but decided to continue working from home, because they could. And another group took the chance to have a sea change or a tree change. This move was driven by a desire for reassessing their lives, a hope for renewal and rejuvenation. Time will tell whether their hopes have been realised.



Even if we haven't done any of these things, we may have thought about them, and certainly as the new year came round, we may have reflected on where 2022 landed, and where we hope to head in 2023. It's not too far into the year to hit the reset button. Or, as I would prefer to title it today: the repent button.

What do I mean? Let's begin with Jesus' and his sea change. Fresh from his temptation, Jesus decides to move from Nazareth, where he had lived most of his life, to Capernaum, a busier and more significant town on the shores of Lake Galilee. So why the move? There are a couple of reasons. Firstly, Matthew informs us that John the Baptist had been put into prison. Not only was this personally distressing for Jesus; it also meant it was time for Jesus to take the baton from John and begin his public ministry.

So why Capernaum though? Galilee was not Jewish heartland like Nazareth. It had about an even mix of Jews and Gentiles. It might seem counter intuitive for Jesus to move away from a place where he had a captive audience of his own people, but God's plan for Jesus' ministry was much more expansive than that. And as Matthew tells us, that's exactly what God told the prophet Isaiah,

**"Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles –the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."**

What was this shadow of death? Galilee was in northern Israel and had been ransacked by the Assyrian army when they had invaded hundreds of years before. And now the Romans were in charge, and that wasn't easy. And it was a place of mixed religious practices. Darkness referred to the lies and dangers of spiritual syncretism. And life was tenuous because of infection and disease. Think of COVID-19 in many guises.



This is the context in which Jesus began the work God had given him to do. And this is the theme of Jesus' proclamation: **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."** What's your reaction to this message. Perhaps that a difficult question to answer given that you and I have heard this word so often. Jesus may provoke a negative response. Who

wants to acknowledge that anything is wrong? Isn't it better to accentuate the positive. Our world is predisposed to overinflate our abilities as human beings. We don't want people to think that we aren't coping, that we've done something wrong, that we need help. Except that the disruption of COVID-19 did lay bare some of our fears and insecurities-our loneliness in the absence of others, our fear of sickness and death, the realisation that we don't have much control over our lives, let alone the wider world.

**“Repent...”** Jesus says. What does he mean by this term? To repent means to make a mind-shift, a change of thinking, of life direction. To turn around which means to walk away from the course we had been pursuing, and to move toward a new way, God’s way in this case. A cross-change, if you like.

This is not an easy word for us to hear. As human beings, we have an overinflated view of ourselves which we can trace back to our first parents. Wanting to be like God, we get into a world of trouble. In our quieter moments, we discern that we’re on the wrong path. But we are often too distracted, or too scared to admit it. The word “repent” is designed to pull us up short, and to call use to take another direction. This direction is Jesus’ way, which is truth and life.

**“Repent,”** Jesus says. Why? **“The kingdom of God has come near.”** That’s the reason. The kingdom of God, God’s rule, has come down to earth in my life, in the things I say and do.” Jesus calls us to repent not because we should be running scared from God. Jesus calls us to repent and come toward his Father, who has come running to find us. Jesus is God in the flesh, he is the manifestation of God’s love.



COVID-19 has been the great disruptor in our lives. It derailed many people’s plans, and still today continues to run its malign course. Sadly, it is still taking lives. Jesus has come as the Great Disruptor, but the disruption he brings gives life. He rescues off from the lie that we can be, should be, self-made people. He asks us to step off the treadmill of performance and achievement, thinking this will push down all our insecurities and gain the approval from others that we crave. He calls us to embrace the gift of forgiveness that he offers in repentance. This forgiveness was hard won. It cost him his life, and it promises us life that never ends.

In today’s gospel, Jesus takes this message to two sets of brothers: Simon and Andrew, and James and John. And how he disrupts their lives. They see and hear Jesus, and such is the power of his words and his presence, that they walk away from those two things which have shaped their lives to that point: work and family. It’s not that those things don’t matter, but that they matter much, much less than the fact that they have been transformed by Jesus’ call. What they do, who they relate with from now on, is done in the light of their new identity in Jesus.

**“Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”** I hear the word “repent” as a gracious invitation to let go of my striving for all the wrong things, my muddle-headed priorities, the hurtful things I say and do when I’m trying to buttress my ego. I need my own agenda disrupted. It’s not easy for me to hear, and to confess, but to lay it before Jesus clears the path yet again for his Spirit to renew me in the image of Christ. And of course it’s the Holy Spirit that drags me to the end of myself, where I can again, and again, acknowledge the love and mercy of God, and seek to respond to faithfully respond to God’s call on my life.



It's only twenty-two days into the new year. Today, each day, is the right time to repent, in the light of the fact that the kingdom of heaven has come near. Near to us, God ruling in our hearts and minds through the wisdom and power of Jesus' cross.

During our recent leave, Jodi and I visited some beautiful regions across Australia: Canberra, the New South Wales South Coast, the Snowy Mountains, northeast Victoria, the West Coast of South Australia. When you are a tourist, you tend to view new locations with rose coloured glasses. What would it be like to live in this delightful location? But geography can't change hearts and mind. The Onion magazine lampooned this kind of thinking: **"Man thinking about just packing up and making exact same mistakes someplace far away."**



This disruption doesn't fix the core issue. Only God has done that, through Jesus' saving death on the cross. It's not the breaking of the waves in a sea change, but the washing given through the word of promise and the water of baptism that changes us and continues to change us through the holy habit of repentance.

Need a new beginning. Find it each and every day in the good news of Jesus Christ, who forgives us fully and disrupts and redirects our lives with his grace. Time for a cross-change. Amen.

Peace in Christ

Pastor Andrew Brook