Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand

Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship

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Luke 3:1-18

*Note: I am trying something different for a while, which is to prepare by writing only a few notes and comments that I will not refer to during my teaching, but send out later. They will contain, I hope, questions for further reflection.*

*I’m doing this because I sometimes feel the text I write gets in the way of my paying attention to what is happening in the room, and what it seems the Spirit is doing among us.*

The gospel text for this week is a continuation of the gospel text of last week. John the Baptist, all grown up, beginning his gospel ministry in the regions “around the Jordan.” People, “crowds,” as Luke says, come out from the cities and villages to hear John preach in the desert, preparing the way of the Lord. The people who self-selected to come out to the desert were (as evidenced by their going out to the desert) were basically religious and spiritual people.

But John’s first word (in Matthew’s version of this story) is “Repent!” In Luke, his first command is, “Bear fruit worthy of repentance!” When Jesus comes preaching the gospel, it’s his first word, too (Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:14-15). When Jesus sends the disciples out to preach the gospel, it’s their first word (Mark 6:12). It’s the first word of the first Christian sermon (Acts 2:38). And it’s the first part of Paul’s description of the gospel he preached (Acts 26:19-20)[[1]](#footnote-1). So *repentance* is an important response to gospel truth.

The reaction of the crowds is encouraging. They ask him, “What shall we do?” His answer is that the person who has more than they need should share with the person who has less than they need. And that government officials (soldiers and tax collectors) should treat people fairly, and not extort from them. (Bess’s comment to me was that John was giving them a version of the Golden Rule).

Like those early crowds, we too are generally religious and spiritual people. My questions are the same two questions I ask over and over:

1. What are ways that God has called you to respond to God’s call to repentance in the past?
2. Deeply hear the word to you: *Repent!* What do you need to repent of? What steps can you take to “turn around”?

1. David Guzik, http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/4003.htm, Accessed December, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)