

Liturgy: The Dialogue of Worship: Reflection & Renewal

Scripture:

Read Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:1-5, Psalm 51:1-4

Introduction:

On most weekends at Redeemer we pause for 3-4 minutes for what we commonly refer to as “Reflection and Renewal,” a moment to corporately stop, think, reflect on the current status of our hearts, and to pray for the Lord’s forgiveness as well as his help in maintaining lives that honor Him. Also known as *confession* and *repentance* in many traditions, this practice is a unique and often misunderstood part of Christian worship and liturgy.

Keep in mind that when the famous Reformer Martin Luther ignited the Protestant Reformation through his posting of the “Ninety-Five Theses” to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany, the very first of the theses stated that “*Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ...willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.*” But what does this mean? How can we really make repentance a regular and irreplaceable part of our faith? In short, a gospel-repentance is all about *formation*: shaping in us a proper understanding of the deceptive nature of sin, making us fully aware of the inadequacy of personal determination and self-will when it comes to transformation, and leading us to deep joy over the provision of Jesus who gave his life for our sin so that our repentance is now a *response* to grace and not a means of it.

Tim Keller writes, “*Consider how the gospel affects and transforms the act of repentance. In “religion,” the purpose of repentance is basically to keep God happy so he will continue to bless you and answer your prayers. This means that religious repentance is selfish, self-righteous, and bitter all the way to the bottom. In the gospel, however, the purpose of repentance is to repeatedly tap into the joy of our union with Christ to weaken our impulse to do anything contrary to God’s heart.*”

Repentance is so much more than a momentary glance toward heaven accompanied by a half-hearted “I’m sorry.” At the same time, repentance is richer than a week-long pity party accompanied by uncontrollable despair. Both are missing the mark in some way because both seem to neglect the crux of the gospel. Repentance can’t earn you God’s love or forgiveness so you don’t need to prove anything through your act of confession. At the same time, because true repentance recognizes that the penalty of our sin was the death of God’s Son, we don’t trivialize our sin or need for Jesus. Gospel repentance is marked by a strange combination of grief (over our sin and its impact) and joy (over the provision of a Savior). This ought to be the daily dance of Christianity.

Reflection: Take personal inventory of your life, heart, and spiritual journey. Use these prompts as a way to prepare for group discussions, or for personal times of prayer.

1. In a fast-paced ever-changing world, we’re rarely encouraged to slow down and take personal inventory of our lives. Do you have a regular practice of slowing down marked by reflection? Try it now.
2. What’s the difference between confession and repentance? (Hint: It’s one thing to confess and admit your sin. It’s quite another to find that sin distasteful and turn from it toward Christ.)

Discuss:

1. What about the sermon stood out or impacted you the most? Do you have any follow up questions about the sermon?
2. Re-read Mark 1:1-5. There we find that John the Baptist was given the task of “preparing the way” for Jesus. Then in verse 4 we read that John was preaching a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In what ways can we connect John’s “preparing” with his message of repentance? What might this mean for us, today?
3. Tish Harrison Warren writes, “*Repentance is not usually a moment wrought in high drama. It is the steady drumbeat of a life in Christ and, therefore, a day in Christ.*” Her comments help to normalize repentance as a regular and formative practice. Discuss what this might look like in your personal and communal devotional life.
4. Re-read Psalm 51:1-4 slowly and reflectively. What stands out to you? How can David say, in verse 4, that against God only has he sinned? Contextually, we know that Psalm 51 was written in the aftermath of David’s adultery with Bathsheba and the accompanying murder of Uriah. David seems to understand the foundational element of sin, that it’s first and foremost an affront to God as Lord and King. Discuss these verses together.

Apply:

Take a moment to read Tim Keller’s short article entitled “All of Life is Repentance.” You can find it at: <http://bit.ly/2iPBbK7>.

How might God be prompting you to understand the role, practice, and beauty of repentance in your life? What do you need to *unlearn* about repentance? How might the gospel invigorate your experience of repentance?