Mark 6-1-13 Repentance for Baptism

Let me start by acknowledging that we are gathering today for a baptism. Today, when we return to church again after a season of separation. And then we hear a Gospel passage with two big themes. The first half is where Jesus talks about his family and home community. I am not going to talk about that bit today. But if you have questions, please call. Today, on the day when we celebrate a baptism, I want to reflect on the second part of our passage, when Jesus sends the disciples out.

And Jesus provides more like a packing list than a job description. Did you notice that?

If you, say, were going to be baptized today and were wondering what it is to be a disciple. You might want to know more than -it is a good idea to wear sandals. If you, say, were going to reaffirm your baptismal vows today and were wondering afresh what it is to be a disciple. You might want to know more than how much bread to bring.

You might want to know what did the disciples actually do when they went out into the world as disciples. In this passage from Mark, I hear, they proclaimed that all should repent.

All of us. Repent.

That's a tough one for the church right now. Repent. We, the church, have often gotten this practice very, very wrong. So today, in preparation for baptismal vows, let me remind us again what repent means.

The origin of this word is a compound. Part one is to turn. The second part is to feel sorrow. Each of these components is worth considering more fully.

Repenting is to turn. At its most basic, repenting is motion. We turn to God, then life happens, and you turn away, maybe just a little, perhaps a lot. We, in living, turn away from God. But, then, always, God invites us to turn again. Repent, turn back to God.

But let us pause to imagine- How do you imagine yourself when you imagine turning away from God? How big does it have to be before you say yeah, I have turned. I'm off track here; now I have to repent. It is tempting to think big. We need to repent of our (Anglican) contribution to residential schools. To think big. The need to repent of murder, adultery, thievery. When we need to repent these things, we **do** need to repent. But the disciples called **all** to repent, not just a few truly terrible people or institutions. All.

Repent is so much more than a big-ticket item. By being a follower of Christ, we commit to the spiritual practice of always being in motion.

I find the metaphor of walking in the woods with a compass useful. We set out on a life with God and it is like starting off into the woods, deep woods, with a compass. You take your bearings, set yourself off to live a life facing God, and start to walk. But it is not possible to walk in the woods in a straight line. You set your direction and start walking, but three steps later, there is a tree in your path, so you veer a tiny little bit off course and set back on track. But then you run into a creek, then a cliff, then a river. You are constantly correcting, returning to your direction.

So it is with the spiritual practice of walking a life turning towards God. You start off facing the right direction, but the obstacles are real. First, you run into worrying about family life, but you only veer a tiny bit and get right on track. Then maybe you go to work and your workplace, that you need because that's how you pay the bills, that's how you eat. Your workplace pushes you further off course. The obstacles are real. The invitation to repentance is a life-giving, forgiving practice. Repentance- to invite us, to guide us, remind us always that a life with God is joy. So when (not if, but when) we turn away, we are all invited to return to joy.

We turn towards love. Turn towards charity and forgiveness. Turn towards hope. Ancient practices like the daily examine and confession are designed to help us pay attention to the constant motion of a faithful life. And take that practice seriously.

Repenting is to turn. When the disciples went out into the world and called all to repent, they were inviting, like today we invite Atsumi, to engage in the practice of always returning to a life with God.

But that was only half of what this word meets. The other half of repentance is about sorrow. To feel sorrow. To be sad that you had turned away from God and regret that turning away. Now, this gets complicated and important. Often when humans get sad, they slip quickly into blame or shame. Repentance is not blaming or shaming. Only sad. Let me say that again. There is no shame when thinking of repentance, no blame, for yourself, not for others. Scripture is very, very clear. We are not to judge each other. No blame, no shame. Only sad.

And- of course, we are sad. We have turned away from God. I remind us that to be turned towards God is joy. When we have turned away from joy, we are sad.

That is the call to repentance, a commitment to the spiritual practice of returning to God and acknowledging that being away from God is sadness.

Each of us today makes or renews our baptismal vows. Each of us turns our hearts and minds and bodies, and with all our strength, we look towards a world full of forgiveness, neighborly love, justice, and peace. We turn to a world where together we safeguard Creation and respect all life on earth. We hope that by word and action, we proclaim that Kingdom of God all day, every day.

And then, every day, we repent so that we can always re-turn to the joy experienced when we turn towards life and light. Repent.