

So what has guided my heart and mind in preparing to preach this Lent – is seeing in the first three Sunday's Gospels – the suggestion to us of certain tools – or things that need to be present in our lives in order for us to be merciful people.

And on the last two Sundays of Lent – we will see mercy in action – as we hear the story of the Prodigal Son, and Jesus' encounter with the woman caught in adultery. Don't be surprised if we have a guest speaker or two for those Sundays. . .

So we get to this third Sunday of Lent – a pivotal Sunday, I think – for the tool or thing that needs to be present in our lives – is absolutely essential. >

In fact, there is no need for the tools of the first two Sundays of Lent – unless this one is present. . .

And the tool is the ability to admit to ourselves – that we need to change. . . We are the fig tree of the Gospel – at times, unable to bear fruit – because we are under-nourished – spiritually – and so we need to change!

And instead of cutting us down or criticizing us for straying or falling short – God, the owner of the orchard – the ultimate owner of all we are and have --- is always willing to give us another chance to do better than we have: a second chance, and a 3rd and a 4th – to turn ourselves around. God never gives up on us!

We need to have the ability to admit to ourselves – that we need to change – in order to be the people God is calling us to be – in order to be merciful. . .

The spiritual word for this ability to change –is repentance:  
Which the dictionary says is “remorse or contrition for past conduct or sin.” [Webster's]  
Christian author Eugene Peterson puts us on surer footing when he writes:

“Repentance is not an emotion. It is not just feeling sorry for your sins. Repentance is a decision.

It is deciding that you have been wrong in supposing that you could manage your own life and be your own god.

It is deciding that you were wrong in thinking that you had, or could get, the strength, the education, or the training to make it on your own.

It is deciding that you have been told a pack of lies about yourself and your neighbors and your world.

And it is deciding that God, in Jesus Christ, is telling you the truth. . . Repentance is a decision to follow Jesus Christ and become his pilgrim in the path of peace.”

Repentance finds its origin in the Greek word, metanoia: which literally means to “turn around” – because we are on a road that is leading us from God instead to God. So we have to turn around, and return home (which is the Gospel story of the Prodigal Son next week) – we need to, as we will soon sing: Return to God with all your heart, the source of grace and mercy; come seek the tender faithfulness of God.

Repentance is key, it's pivotal, it's necessary. Without it, there is no need to reprioritize our lives (lesson 1 of Lent) nor to listen to Jesus (lesson 2). Without a sense of repentance we can just ease on down whatever road we are on – never worrying or wondering if it is leading us to God or away from God.

Repentance is a decision – a decision to follow Jesus Christ and become his pilgrim in the path of peace.

We need to repent – when the first question we are asking is “what's in this for me” instead of what's the most loving thing for me to do. . .

We need to turn around when faced with a decision – if asking ourselves “what is the most just thing for me to do” doesn't even enter our minds.

We need to get on a new road when we are constantly asking what is wrong with the world or another person instead of asking what's right.

We need to repent – when we are running away from home – that is the kingdom of God – instead of staying home.

We need to turn around when we insist on always seeing things our way – instead of trying to step into the shoes of another.

We need to get on a new road when we are ignoring the ones important to God – the poor, the oppressed, the needy --- instead of finding ways to help ease their pain.

Like Moses in the first reading – God has something special in mind for each one of us. But we will never get around to doing what God wants us to do – if we're too busy trying to get our own way.

So REPENT!

Return to God with all your heart, the source of grace and mercy; come seek the tender faithfulness of God.