Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
"Instead of judging, we repent"
(Ash Wednesday Sermon)
March 05, 2025

Scripture

Psalm 51:1-19
Luke 13:1-5

Core Idea and purpose

Core ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- None. This is a standalone sermon.

Core Idea: Instead of judging people, we need to investigate our own hearts and repent.

Purpose: To help people continue on with an attitude of repentance throughout Lent and beyond.

The Sermon

When tragedy strikes other people, we often ask why and then conclude that the victim must somehow be at fault. People have accused rape victims of 'asking for it' by dressing or flirting a certain way. It's common to justify the lack of compassion for the poor and downtrodden because they're lazy and made a series of bad choices. When natural disasters such as hurricanes or earthquakes hit a populated area, some religious leaders blame the rampant sins in those areas. By blaming the victims, it becomes easy to justify a lack of compassion for them.

While it may be true that in many circumstances a lack of good judgment contributes to a person's misery, the total cause of the suffering is almost always a variety of conditions, many of which are beyond the sufferers' control. For this reason, Jesus calls us not to judge people who are suffering but to love and help them. He drove this point home when He commented on some of the local news stories of His day.

We find this story in Luke 13:1-5. Jesus and His Apostles were on their way to Jerusalem when some people told Him about some Galileans who were killed by Roman Soldiers while offering sacrifices to the Lord. The murdered Galileans may have been Zealots who revolted against Rome and the Roman Soldiers may have killed them while they were offering sacrifices to God at the temple. In this way, their blood would have been mixed with their sacrifices.

Evidently, the people who told Jesus this news indicated that these Galileans were deserving of such a horrible fate. The people may have thought the Galileans deserved it for being foolish enough to take on the mighty Roman Empire. The people who told Jesus the news were judging the victims.

Jesus used this as a teaching opportunity and stated, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will perish." Jesus was teaching that instead of judging people, we should investigate our own hearts and repent.

To emphasize the importance of this teaching, Jesus continued with another illustration, "Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will perish." Siloam was a pool located south of the temple in Jerusalem. The pool of Siloam was most likely used by Jews as a ritual bath prior to entering the temple. It's the same pool where Jesus healed a blind man (John 9:1-12). The tower spoken of here by Jesus may have been one of the towers on the city walls located near the pool of Siloam. Evidently, one of the wall towers near the Pool of Siloam collapsed and killed 18 people. Sometimes, tragedy happens, and the victims are no better or worse than anyone else. Instead of judging people, we are called to investigate our own hearts and repent.

If we are called to not judge but repent, then we should ask the questions: What is repentance? What does it mean to repent?

Repentance is a sincere desire to change. It's a desire because we can't change ourselves. We depend on the Holy Spirit to change us. It's our role to cooperate with the Holy Spirit so the Holy Spirit can change us.

God gave us a great example of repentance in Psalm 51. King David wrote this Psalm when the Lord convicted him of adultery and murder. In the tenth verse, King David wrote, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me," Without this request for a changed heart, King David would not have truly repented. Repentance is more than simply saying "I'm sorry." It's a sincere desire to change.

You can also think of repentance as the divine U-turn. It's a sincere desire to turn away from a life of sin to a life of holiness and love, or a sincere desire to turn from a self-centered life to a God-centered life. One way leads to death while the other way leads to eternal life.

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The U-turn is divine because it is God's grace that brings us to the point of repentance. God's grace is God's undeserved love for us that is made known to us through the Holy Spirit. God's grace draws us to the realization we are sinners and brings us to the point of repentance. Do not resist this grace. Allow it to bring you to the point of brokenness so you can repent.

Repentance is not a one-time act that we do when we are saved and first receive God's forgiveness through faith in Jesus. Repentance starts at conversion but doesn't stop there. It is a continuous attitude that accompanies us throughout our Christian lives. As we walk with Christ, the Holy Spirit reveals to us the sinful attitudes and desires within our hearts. As we become aware of these attitudes and desires, we must repent. To do so, we must ask God to cleanse our hearts and replace these sinful attitudes and desires with God's holy love. The Holy Spirit uses this process to make us more holy & loving like Christ.

Repentance starts with extreme sorrow but ends with a joy that surpasses all understanding. It begins when we honestly investigate our hearts and acknowledge our sinful desires, attitudes and motivations. Through prayer, Bible study, worship, fasting, service and Christian accountability, the Holy Spirit reveals to us all the hatred, anger, jealousies, lust, selfishness, greed, prejudices, racisms etc.. that reside within our hearts. Once the Holy Spirit reveals these sinful attitudes, desires and motivations to us, we must admit to them and ask God to change our hearts. This is not fun and creates extreme sorrow.

This sorrow, however, will turn to joy because repentance continues when we ask God to change our hearts. When we recognize the sinful attitudes, desires and motivations within our hearts, we also discover that God continues to love us. We also discover that the Holy Spirit works to cleanse our hearts of these sinful attitudes, desires and motivations and replace them with God's holy love. In this way, we become more holy and loving like Jesus. As we become more holy & loving like Jesus, the more joy we experience. Hence, repentance may start with sorrow but will always end with joy.

Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent are designed to help us maintain a continuous attitude of repentance.

The ashes on our foreheads remind us that, at some point, our fleshy bodies will cease to function. We will experience physical death. From ashes we came and to ashes we will go. Therefore, the time to repent is always now because tomorrow is not guaranteed to us.

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The Lenten season provides us with opportunities to repent. Ash Wednesday, personal devotions, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, fasting and even Easter Sunday are wonderful worshipful opportunities to repent.

What attitudes or actions do you need to repent of? Is it pride? Is it hate? Is it prejudice? Is it jealousy? Is it selfishness? Is it laziness? Is it lust? Is it violence? Is it meanness? Is it drunkenness? During Lent, ask God to show you what you need to repent of. That’s a scary thing to do. There’s no telling what God might reveal. It will, however, draw you into a closer relationship with the Lord and end with Joy as God changes your heart to make you more holy and loving like Jesus.

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I. When tragedy strikes other people, we often ask why and then conclude that the victim must somehow be at fault.
   A. People have accused rape victims of 'asking for it' by dressing or flirting a certain way.
   B. It's common to justify the lack of compassion for the poor and downtrodden because they're lazy and made a series of bad choices.
   C. When natural disasters such as hurricanes or earthquakes hit a populated area, some religious leaders blame the rampant sins in those areas.
      - By blaming the victims, it becomes easy to justify a lack of compassion for them.
   D. While it may be true that in many circumstances a lack of good judgment contributes to a person's misery, the total cause of the suffering is almost always a variety of conditions, some of which are beyond the sufferers' control.
      - For this reason, Jesus calls us not to judge people who are suffering but to love and help them.
      - He drove this point home when He commented on some of the local news stories of His day.

II. We find this story in Luke 13:1-5.
   A. Jesus and His Apostles were on their way to Jerusalem when some people told Him about some Galileans who were killed by Roman Soldiers while offering sacrifices to the Lord.
      - The murdered Galileans may have been Zealots who revolted against Rome and the Roman Soldiers may have killed them while they were offering sacrifices to God at the temple.
      - In this way, their blood would have been mixed with their sacrifices.
   B. Evidently, the people who told Jesus this news indicated that these Galileans were deserving of such a horrible fate.

- The people may have thought the Galileans deserved it for being foolish enough to take on the mighty Roman Empire.
- The people who told Jesus the news were judging the victims.

C. Jesus used this as a teaching opportunity and stated, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will perish."
    - Jesus was teaching that instead of judging people, we should investigate our own hearts and repent.

D. To emphasize the importance of this teaching, Jesus continued with another illustration, "Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will perish."
    - Siloam was a pool located south of the temple in Jerusalem.
        - The pool of Siloam was most likely used by Jews as a ritual bath prior to entering the temple.
        - It's the same pool where Jesus healed a blind man (John 9:1-12).
        - The tower spoken of here by Jesus may have been one of the towers on the city walls located near the pool of Siloam.
        - Evidently, one of the wall towers near the Pool of Siloam collapsed and killed 18 people.
        - Sometimes, tragedy happens, and the victims are no better or worse than anyone else.
        - Instead of judging people, we are called to investigate our own hearts and repent.

III. If we are called to not judge but repent, then we should ask the questions: What is repentance? What does it mean to repent?

A. Repentance is a sincere desire to change.

- It's a desire because we can't change ourselves.
  - We depend on the Holy Spirit to change us.
  - It's our role to cooperate with the Holy Spirit so the Holy Spirit can change us.
- God gave us a great example of repentance in Psalm 51.
  - King David wrote this Psalm when the Lord convicted him of adultery and murder.
  - In the tenth verse, King David wrote, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me,"
  - Without this request for a changed heart, King David would not have truly repented.
  - Repentance is more than simply saying "I'm sorry."
  - It's a sincere desire to change.

B. You can also think of repentance as the divine U-turn.
   - It's a sincere desire to turn away from a life of sin to a life of holiness and love, or a sincere desire to turn from a self-centered life to a God-centered life.
   - One way leads to death while the other way leads to eternal life.
   - The U-turn is divine because it is God's grace that brings us to the point of repentance.
     - God's grace is God's undeserved love for us that is made known to us through the Holy Spirit.
     - God's grace draws us to the realization we are sinners and brings us to the point of repentance.
     - Do not resist this grace. Allow it to bring you to the point of brokenness so you can repent.

C. Repentance is not a one-time act that we do when we are saved and first receive God's forgiveness through faith in Jesus.
   - Repentance starts at conversion but doesn't stop there.

- It is a continuous attitude that accompanies us throughout our Christian lives.
    - As we walk with Christ, the Holy Spirit reveals to us the sinful attitudes and desires within our hearts.
    - As we become aware of these attitudes and desires, we must repent.
    - To do so, we must ask God to cleanse our hearts and replace these sinful attitudes and desires with God's holy love.
    - The Holy Spirit uses this process to make us more holy & loving like Christ.

D. Repentance starts with extreme sorrow but ends with a joy that surpasses all understanding.
    - It begins when we honestly look into our hearts and acknowledge our sinful desires, attitudes and motivations.
        - Through prayer, Bible study, worship, fasting, service and Christian accountability, the Holy Spirit reveals to us all the hatred, anger, jealousies, lust, selfishness, greed, prejudices, racisms etc.. that reside within our hearts.
        - Once the Holy Spirit reveals these sinful attitudes, desires and motivations to us, we must admit to them and ask God to change our hearts.
        - This is not fun and creates extreme sorrow.
    - This sorrow, however, will turn to joy because repentance continues when we ask God to change our hearts.
        - When we recognize the sinful attitudes, desires and motivations within our hearts, we also discover that God continues to love us.

- We also discover that the Holy Spirit works to cleanse our hearts of these sinful attitudes, desires and motivations and replace them with God's holy love.
- In this way, we become more holy and loving like Jesus.
- As we become more holy & loving like Jesus, the more joy we experience.
- Hence, repentance may start with sorrow but will always end with joy.

IV. Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent are designed to help us maintain a continuous attitude of repentance.

A. The ashes on our foreheads remind us that, at some point, our fleshy bodies will cease to function.

- We will experience physical death.
- From ashes we came and to ashes we will go.
- Therefore, the time to repent is always now because tomorrow is not guaranteed to us.

B. The Lenten season provides us with opportunities to repent.

- Ash Wednesday, personal devotions, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, fasting and even Easter Sunday are wonderful worshipful opportunities to repent.
- What attitudes or actions do you need to repent of?
  - Is it pride? Is it hate? Is it prejudice? Is it jealousy? Is it selfishness? Is it laziness? Is it lust? Is it violence? Is it meanness? Is it drunkenness?
- During Lent, ask God to show you what you need to repent of.
  - That's a scary thing to do.
  - There's no telling what God might reveal.

- It will, however, draw you into a closer relationship with the Lord and end with Joy as God changes your heart to make you more holy and loving like Jesus.