

***Luke 13:2–5 (NIV): Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? 3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. 4 Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”***

For Harry Houdini the dream was to be an entertainer. And so he spent his life in pursuit of that dream; starting off in a circus freak show as the “wild man”, and then progressing to card tricks. But he was pretty average at card tricks and quickly tired of the “wild man” stick. But then he struck upon an idea. He would become an escape artist, but not just any escape artist. He would become the greatest escape artist in the history of escape artists.

Houdini performed in Europe. He performed in America. He freed himself from handcuffs, He freed himself from jails. He freed himself from chains, ropes, and straitjackets. But, because of imitators, Houdini put his "handcuff act" behind him and upped the ante, now allowing himself to be bound and then submerged in barrels filled with water suspended far above gaping spectators. Once he went so far as to be chained and submerged in a barrel of beer.

The crowds ate it up. How could he escape from all those chains? It was superhuman, maybe even supernatural. Everyone wondered the same question. How can you be handcuffed and chained and then put in barrel and suspended from the sky, and still escape? What was the secret?

Jesus tells us it involves escaping chains, but of a different sort than Harry Houdini escaped from. Jesus tells us how to escape from the chains of sin and guilt, and ultimately death itself. God has a plan for this, and it all revolves around repentance.

Repentance is critical.

It is so critical that without repentance you really cannot call yourself a Christian.

It is so critical that Jesus says without it you will perish.

It is so critical that the word is used hundreds and hundreds of times in the OT and Jesus speaks of it time and time again in the new.

Jesus preaches: ***“But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”***

There is no getting around it. It is simply part and parcel of every Christian’s life.

***It has to be part of your life.*** And when it is you will reap great blessings; certainly it is essential to your salvation.

But repentance also offers earthly benefits as well. Like we saw in our second lesson. Repentance means that sin need no longer control you. It means that you will be able to battle the very temptations that threaten to destroy your marriage. Your career. Your health.

Yes, repentance, will allow you to look at yourself in the mirror again, with respect. It means that you will no longer need to hide from others, or more importantly, attempt to hide from God, like Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden after they had taken some of the fruit about which they were commanded not to eat.

Repentance will allow you to experience the full impact of this Lenten Season. As we walk repentant to the cross. So let's dig in.

You have heard that word often enough, but what does it really mean? Repentance first meant to understand afterward. We might call it "having hindsight." In other words it was to say, "If I had known then what I know now I wouldn't have done that." Have you ever looked back at pictures of yourself or of your parents that were taken in the 80's: legwarmers and mullets? Now, there may have been a time when you wore a mullet or legwarmers, a time when you liked those styles. But what do you think now? Didn't notice many of you rocking leg warmers this morning. That is repentance.

Repentance is saying that something we used to love, now disgusts us. To repent of sin means to say just that about our sin. We loved our sin. We loved our selfishness and pride. We loved our lusts and our desires. We loved to talk about others behind their back. More than anything we loved placing ourselves and our wants above anyone else. To repent is to say that all of that *which we loved* now disgusts us.

The first step in repentance is the recognition that we are enchained, engulfed, enslaved; that our sin is ruining our lives, that it is separating us from others, that it is leading us to cover up our actions with piles of lies. More importantly it is making a relationship with God impossible.

Repentance is beginning of the freedom.  
Repentance is the beginning of confidence.  
Repentance revolves confronting our complete inability to fix sin ourselves. It leads us to recognize the absolute necessity of God's Grace.

Many people think of repentance as merely “change of action”. So the addict no longer feeds the addiction. The abuser, no longer abuses. The liar no longer lies. But repentance is more demanding than a change of behaviors. Repentance involves now only a change in behavior, but also a change in thought. The word itself means a “change of mind”.

True repentance isn't just being afraid of consequences. Have you ever tried to scare yourself into obedience? If mom finds out, if my boss finds out, if the police find out.... As if we can build up enough consequences for our actions that we will no longer want to do it. It may work, for a while.

Jared Fogle, the subway guy, also knew that getting caught would cost him. And it did; his contract, his marriage, his freedom. All, all, lost. Did he know better? Yes he did, but knowing you should stop and being enabled to stop is not the same thing.

If you are attempting to manufacture repentance based on fear then you will end up spending your time trying not to get caught. Our goal becomes, not to do the right thing, but not to get caught doing the wrong thing. And even if you do manage to scare yourself straight, it is only on the outside.

But God asks for more, no, He demands more. He demands our actions change, God demands our hearts change. God demands, that our trees, which are barren, start to bear fruit.

I love Carmel Macchiatos. Now, I can't make myself start hating Caramel Macchiatos, no matter how hard I try. If I am going to stop loving CM and start hating them, something about me must change. Maybe I get sick or develop an allergy, but something must happen to me. I am not going to start hating CM on my own. It is similar with repentance. We can't “make” ourselves start hating what we love.

If you are struggling with temptation you know how impossible it is to simply stop desiring something.

You all know that we can't bring ourselves to faith. That has been burned into your brains in throughout your life, I hope. We can't anymore make ourselves more repentant than we can make ourselves believers. That is God's work. That is what God accomplishes on a daily basis with Law and Gospel. That is why it is so

important to be around Christians and God's Word. A casual relationship with Communion will not give what I need to fight off temptation.

A sometimes connection with church will not strengthen me to the point I can conquer my addiction. I am not going to gain repentance by sitting in my room and trying to be a better person. I am not going to grow to hate my sin by sitting at my computer surfing the internet. I *only* get that from God, who works repentance in us through His Word.

Repentance is a step in God's personal plan of salvation for you. It was planned with you in mind and with you as its beneficiary. It is accomplished in us through his Word and sacrament. May this Lenten season bring you repentance and with repentance, faith in Jesus, and with Jesus, salvation. That is Lenten Repentance.  
Amen.