

Title: “Turn and Live”

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Ezek. 18:32, Phil. 2:8; Matt. 21:32

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Service Readings: Ezek. 18:1-4, 25-32; Phil 2:1-18; Matt 21:23-32

God does not delight in the death of sinners but calls them to repentance and life. This call is fulfilled in Jesus through His death and resurrection. He creates in us a desire to live a life of continual repentance – daily returning to our Baptism.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Today's sermon is taken from all three of our readings and the message really comes down to simply this: because you belong to Christ, you can turn and live. Because Christ has forgiven you, you don't have to defend yourself. And because Christ is at work in you, repentance changes how you live. That's the bottom line. Now, as tempting as it might be to close now in prayer, I would like to spend a few moments unpacking these statements to uncover the true richness of God's grace and mercy that is proclaimed through them.

These messages are all about identity and the life we live as disciples of Christ and a key question that is answered is really this: if we are forgiven children who belong to him, and if he is at work within us, what does a repentant, Christ-rooted life *actually* look like on Monday morning? You might immediately jump to a task list of things that a Christian *should* or *should not* be doing. You might even run through that list in your mind to determine where you stand and what you must change to live that Christ-rooted life. But that is not what these passages teach. They are not instructional verses that demand us to be better, to work more diligently, to try harder. Quite the opposite. They are descriptions of the work that Jesus did *for* us. These passages are to be a comfort to us; they are to free us so that we can wake up Monday morning with the reminder that we are free to live in Christ. So let's get started. What does a Christ-rooted life actually look like on Monday morning?

First, it means that we stop defending ourselves to God. During the time of Ezekiel, they attempted to do exactly that. Their sins, they said, were not their fault.... They were simply just products of their parents and others who had gone before them. *They* were not the ones who caused God to make them wander for years in the dessert. If *they* were the ones in the dessert, the nation would surely have made it to the Promised Land in record time! How often do we take the same posture? Surely it is not *me* to blame for how I am! I am simply a product of my family, my society, my world. My actions are actions that are *required* to live in this world. Anything less, and I don't see how I could feed my family.

But also included in the Lord's words through Ezekiel are these:

²⁷ Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life. ²⁸ Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions that he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.

This cuts much closer to the heart. Wickedness leads to death, righteousness leads to life. We know where we stand. We know the sins of our daily lives. And we know the death they lead to. Admitting these sins to ourselves is difficult, but admitting them to God? Often times it feels impossible because we know that it is *he* who decides our eternal fate. And so we try to justify them, or hide them. We even hide *from God*

because of them. For if we don't have to face God, we don't have to face his judgement. So Monday mornings begin with recognizing our sinfulness. But it is also remembering what God wants for us. He reminds us through Ezekiel: ³²“For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.”

But, how do we turn and live if we are sinful and do not always do what is just and right? This is where Paul's letter to the Philippians becomes helpful. God didn't wait for us to repent and find him, he came to us.

Christ Jesus,⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,⁸ being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Monday morning is for waking and recognizing our sinfulness. But it is also finding comfort in the sacrificial work of Jesus on the cross. God has no pleasure in the death of *you* and sent his son to take upon himself *your* wickedness, *your* mistakes, ... *your* shame. He gathered them to himself and died a death that you deserved. On the cross, as he suffered physical pain, he endured something even greater as his father turned his back on him. This was hell. This is the hell that you deserved, that I deserved. But it is a hell that Jesus endured on our behalf. On the cross he died. But from the grave he rose in great proclamation that the sins he carried for us were paid for and the death we deserved no longer has power over us. You see, Monday morning is for waking up remembering that in our baptism Christ claimed our lives. We now belong to him. And because we belong to him, we can turn and live. Because Christ has forgiven us, we no longer have to defend our sinful actions. We can repent and receive forgiveness.

And this daily reminder propels us forward. Forward to enter the day. In our Gospel passage, Jesus speaks a parable about two people who are asked by their father to work in a vineyard.

A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹ And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went.

Our Monday mornings are about turning, turning away from sin and turning toward Christ in repentance. But it is also about leaving our beds. We belong to Christ. He has claimed us. He has redeemed us. Our identity is in him. And now he sends us out into the world to serve our neighbors. *This*. This is the definition of discipleship. Discipleship is not about what we *do*, but is about who we *are*. Discipleship is about continually being turned toward Christ and, from Christ, toward our neighbor. Discipleship is about *turning* and *living*.

Who are you? Who am I? I am Christ's. And because we are Christ's, we can repent; we can receive forgiveness; we can forgive; we can serve. Because our identity is found in him, we can give; we can love; we can turn; we can live. Turning and living is not God telling us to become someone different. It is God turning us back to who we are already in Christ. And so, Monday morning is about remembering *whose* you are. So, tomorrow, Monday morning, *turn* and *live*.

Let us pray. Gracious Father, thank You that in Christ we are Your forgiven and beloved children. Turn our hearts away from sin and toward the mercy of Jesus. Remind us each morning whose we are, and by Your Holy Spirit work in us to will and to do Your good pleasure. Send us into the world to love and serve our neighbors as those who belong to Christ. Keep us faithful in repentance, steadfast in faith, and joyful in the freedom You have given us. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.