

Repentance Is Most Practically Expressed as *Courage* to Believe That God Can Make a New Beginning in Us

When we hear Mark's story of cosmic upheaval and the return of Jesus on the clouds, our reaction "is that we want to be part of it, we want to be ready for it," the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander said in his sermon Sunday. "We want to anticipate Jesus' return, not be fearful of it. So the question becomes: How do we go about that? What do we do? Where do we sign to join that club of those who want to be ready for Jesus' return?"

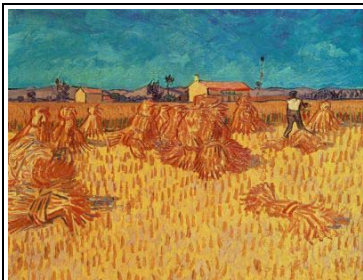
"Today, we begin to answer that question, as we are placed back at the beginning of the story," Pastor Thelander continued. "The beginning of the story finds John (the Baptist) describing *how* people join the community of those expecting the return of Jesus in his dramatic apocalypse. . . . We might consider John part of the 'lunatic fringe,' but if we want to be a part of the community awaiting Jesus' dramatic return, we must take our place in line, venture out into the wilderness, and hear what he has to say."

"To be part of that group awaiting Jesus' dramatic return . . . requires a radical shift in our thinking, and a complete reorientation of our values. Isaiah and John use many images to describe it, but its essence (is that to) join those who are eagerly awaiting Jesus' return at the end of the story, those at the beginning of the story must . . . (as he stepped away from the pulpit, hands cupped around mouth, calling loudly) *repent*."

("I've always wanted to do that," Pastor Thelander interjected.) "Ah, there, I've said it, but John, and Isaiah before him, were 'way ahead of me,'" he continued.

To see what repentance would "look like", Pastor Thelander turned to the O.T. lesson, and to the words of Isaiah. "The passage is a word of comfort, and actually begins with the word, 'comfort'. Any time you begin a message to folks with a double dose of comfort, you know something is very wrong," he said, as it was for Isaiah's audience at the time of the Israelite captivity in Babylon. Isaiah's message was an instruction to prepare the way for the Lord's return with his people to Jerusalem, for people who had "endured a double portion of heartache for as long as they can remember."

"Keeping Isaiah's words in mind . . . I believe that repentance is most practically expressed as *courage*: courage to change our actions where necessary, yes, but the courage I have in mind . . . is the courage to *believe*, to open ourselves to the possibility that God can invade the hopeless situation in our world and in our lives and make a new beginning. Repentance begins when you can look at the failure, the disap- (p. 2→)



"Wheat Field with Sheaves", by Van Gogh. Image credit: www.fineartprintsandemand.com. This Sunday, the third Sunday of Advent, will be *Gaudet* Sunday, meaning, in Latin, "Rejoice!" So, in Psalm 126, we'll read the following: "When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream. . . . Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves." In the Epistle Paul will tell us, "Always be joyful." In the O.T., we'll read, "Be glad; rejoice forever in my creation!" Sunday will also be "stir up Sunday", after the Collect which begins, "Stir up your power, O Lord."

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On the Web: www.epworthchapelonthegreen.org

Sundays, 10:00 a.m.: Word & Table service

Sundays, 11:30 a.m.: Refreshments, conversation

Sundays, 11:45 a.m.: Moderated post-service discussion

Sunday, 6:00 p.m.: Advent Lessons & Carols

Tuesday and Thursday, 7:00 p.m.: Advent Evening Prayers

For the poor (updated list): Fresh potatoes, paper plates, plastic silverware and napkin sets, turkeys, hams, canned yams, sweet potatoes, corn, green beans, cranberry sauce, ready-to-serve rolls, butter or margarine in 1-lb. tubs, stuffing mix, disposable salt/pepper shakers, frozen pies, onions, cake/dessert mixes, tamale-making ingredients: pork cushion meat, masa corn meal.

Readings, 12/14, 10 a.m.: Is. 65:17-25; Ps. 126; 1 Thess. 5:12-28; John 1:6-8, 19-28. **12/14, 6 p.m., Lessons & Carols:** Is. 40:1-8; Jer. 23:5-6; Is. 11:1-9; Micah 5:2-5; Zech. 9:9-10; Is. 35:1-10; Is. 7:10-15; Jer. 31:31-34; Luke 1:26-38. **12/21:** 2 Sam. 7:4, 8-16; Ps. 132:8-18; Rom. 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38.

Prayer Emphases: Uganda; Seventh Day Adventist Church; Church of Christ, Columbia, SC, and the Rev. Mickey Burleson; Interlinke IRC Ministries; parishioners on Curtis Road.

(Sermon, cont'd.) pointment, the hopeless situation in your life, and summon the courage to believe that God is doing something new. Repentance begins when you can . . . proclaim by faith . . . *God is coming into this hopeless situation* . . . the way things are is not they way they always will be." At the Table this morning, the bread and wine speak to us, "*Our God is coming!*"