

## Morning Worship Services

Sunday, December 14, 2008

### Face to Face: New Beginnings “Face to Face with Repentance”

Mark 1:14-15

Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh, Senior Pastor

G.F. Handel in his *Messiah* cites Malachi 3:2 in “And the Glory of the Lord”, “But who may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner’s fire.”

On July 4, 1854, Charlie Peace, a well-known criminal in London, was hung. The Anglican Church had a ceremony for hanging people. When Charlie Peace was marched to the gallows, a priest read these words from the Prayer Book: “Those who die without Christ experience hell, which is the pain of forever dying without the release which death itself can bring.” When these chilling words were read, Charlie Peace stopped in his tracks, turned to the priest, and shouted, “Do you believe that?” The priest stammered for a moment and said, “Well...I...suppose I do.” “Well, I don’t,” said Charlie. “But if I did, I’d get down on my hands and knees and crawl all over Great Britain, even if it were paved with pieces of broken glass, if I could rescue one person from what you just told me.”<sup>1</sup>

The message that those who die without Jesus Christ experience hell was an engaging message to Charlie Peace. How, you may ask? Although Mr. Peace did not believe in Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and Lord and repent, that message engaged him to consider the notion of eternal life. He said that if he believed it to be true, he would crawl on his hands and knees all over Great Britain and tell others about the good news in Jesus Christ.

Being a person who shares good news is the follower of Jesus’ calling. Sharing the message is not first and foremost about the other person. It is about you and your willingness to be obedient. The message is not about the person with whom you are sharing and whether or not he receives it. It is about your willingness to share. The reception of the message is up to God.

My task as a Minister of Word and Sacrament and a follower of Jesus Christ is to be obedient by

preaching the message of new life in Jesus Christ. It is your task as well. Of all the messages that you give others to be effective human beings, to give the message that life can be different through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is the most important.

We miss the kingdom of God by not giving others the opportunity to say yes or no to the invitation to follow Jesus. Repent and believe. John the Baptist had prepared the way for Jesus as the eschatological messenger who would announce the arrival of God's rule and deliverance. Not only was Jesus the messenger, but he was effecting God's rule in history. Jesus was both the one who proclaimed the good news from God in terms of the coming of God's promised redemptive rule and the one through whom this good news was effected in history. Repent and believe. Jesus used those words, but also embodied those words. He invited others to repent and believe, but he had modeled how that was done when he was baptized by John the Baptist for all of humanity and believed on behalf of all humanity. Jesus said and lived the words. We are to do the same.

Your history changed when you repented and believed the invitation to follow Jesus. Jerome, as he reflects upon the first disciples following Jesus. "There must have been something divinely compelling in the face of the Savior. Otherwise they would not have acted so irrationally as to follow a man whom they had never seen before. There was something divine in the Savior's very countenance that men, seeing, could not resist."<sup>2</sup>

Tell others what God is doing in your life. Let others see the face of Jesus in your face. Your history is different because you are a follower. You have seen the kingdom of God. Repent and believe. Pause for a minute, however. It really is the other way around. Believe and repent. It is only after regeneration that you then can see that the promises of God are good, true and fully reliable. You then believe. And then, you have the courage to repent, that is, go in the different direction; God's direction. "Blessing and honor and glory and power; wisdom and riches and strength evermore Give ye to Him,

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<sup>1</sup>Tony Campolo, *Let Me Tell You A Story* (Nashville, Tennessee: W Publishing Group, 2000), 102-103.

<sup>2</sup>Jerome, *Homily 83*.

who our battle hath won; whose are the kingdom, the crown, and the throne."<sup>3</sup> For every ten Charlie Peace's there will be one who responds to the good news. For every ten Charlie Peace's there will be one who repents and believes.

Advent is about new beginnings. There are the new beginnings of the second coming and the secret work of God in regeneration that is being born again. There is also the new beginning of repentance. Repentance is that "heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ."<sup>4</sup> Believe and repent. Face to face with Jesus. Come closer. Be changed. Let us pray!

*This sermon was preached on Sunday, 14 December 2008 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh  
at Eastminster Presbyterian Church in Wichita, Kansas.*

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<sup>3</sup>Taken from G.F. Handel's *Messiah*, "Blessing and Honour, Glory and Power"

<sup>4</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 492.