

Repentance

For the last ten years that I taught, I was in Special Education classes for students who were classified with an Emotional disability as their primary or secondary disability listed on the Individual Educational Plan. Often they were placed with me because their emotional disability did not allow them to be successful in the classroom with issues in behavior, socialization, or both. Some of those issues also hindered potential academic progress. Hence, they were put in a small group setting with the goal to return to the mainstream.

Early on, I had the good fortune to work with a very good behavior specialist. We would work together to see if we could get students to own their own behavior with the goal to get back out into the mainstream classrooms. We were able to do quick assessments and figure out what worked best for the students. I settled on teaching them that behavior is a choice that only they can make. In the same way that I could not make them do math, I could not make them behave. We had a sign in the room that read, “You get to choose your behavior but you do NOT always get to choose the consequences.”

I almost always worked off of an “if/then” situation. “Here is what you did. If you do it again, then this is what the consequence will be.” There were times, though, when I would check in with the behavior specialist to see if I had been too easy or too hard on the kids. (I tended to be too easy.) One time, the specialist said

to me that this one particular student may need to cry it out. I didn't yell at the student but very firmly told him that I was shocked and disappointed at his behavior and hoped that this would never happen again. The student "cried it out", was repentant, and we were able to move on with the rest of the day.

Much like those of us gathered here today, those students dealt with the concepts of temptation, resistance of temptation, forgiveness, the need to forgive others, the need to forgive themselves, and the need to deal with restorative justice or repentance when they had done something wrong or "sinned."

Our readings today remind us that throughout history people have struggled with the same issues that we do today, more than 2000 years later. Do we believe in a God who insists that we are repentant? I don't think so. I think that God's grace and love are there for us regardless of our own state. However, it is the human condition that leads us to restorative justice and repentance to allow ourselves to feel that forgiveness so lovingly offered to us by God.

Restorative justice is the means by which we can repair a situation that our actions have caused. It is as simple as offering an apology and doing an act to show your sorrow. If a child breaks a window due to roughhousing or play ball when they had been told not to, the child should not only apologize but also help in paying for and repairing the window. Hopefully, by these actions, the child will see the damage that was caused by his/her actions

While restorative justice is performative, repentance is liberative. The invitation found in the parable is not to live in fear of Pilate or paranoia about accidental death. Rather, we are invited to take a look at what needs to be done through repentance, which tells us to stop what we are doing. Once we stop, realize we are wrong, ask for forgiveness, and move on, we can THEN do something to continue it. Or do we have to change it?

Let's look at the parable of the fig tree and put ourselves or our actions as the fig tree. If our actions or a particular way of thinking are causing our fruit not to grow, do our actions and thought processes need to be cut out of our lives? Is God going to cut US out or chop us down? Is salvation even possible for us?

Luckily, we have learned that it is. We are saved through repentance and post-repentance. Once we have made our amends, received forgiveness, and have moved on in our lives, never to turn back to whatever powers of evil or hurtful pursuits that keep us from abundant life. We are blessed by a God who gives us numerous opportunities to "do the right thing." The way in which we live out our call to Christianity is a choice that we have to make. We are given free will to make our choices. However, we know the spiritual consequences of our actions as we move away from the relationship offered to us by God.

As we move to Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday, I hope that we are able to begin to recognize the fullness of God's love and to remove

whatever stand between us and it. Let us be a people of repentance so that we can fully embrace God's greatest gift to us through the salvation offered by Jesus. This way we can truly celebrate the new life within us given in the Resurrection on Easter morning.