

Message Reflections

a little something extra to keep you connected to Jesus this week

Message Reflections accompany the [weekly message](#).

Repentance was defined for us this weekend as the changing of one's mind and purpose as a result of new knowledge. That is precisely what coming to faith meant for me. I wish I had a story where I came to faith and was baptized immediately, but the reality is that it didn't happen until several years later. The moment I came to faith was the moment of my true repentance. It was a pivotal moment, literally and figuratively, where I changed directions. But baptism didn't feel necessary. I had been baptized as a baby in the Catholic church, confirmed Lutheran, and rededicated my life to Christ while taking a walk in my neighborhood. At this point it felt arbitrary, like pomp and circumstance. It was in my small group that I was boldly challenged by my friend to be obedient and be baptized. He related that accepting Christ is a two part process: first the change of heart and mind, then the outward declaration of that new life through baptism—as my first act of submission and obedience to Christ. I didn't agree with him but I promised to pray and really consider it, which I did. I still wasn't convinced. A few weeks later, our church offered a baptism class taught by Tim Garner (Ret.). It was in that class that I decided to be baptized as an adult, as a personal choice, to obey and leave no question about my faith and devotion. Jesus was baptized and he was sinless. If he felt he needed to be baptized, then it was good enough for me. I also wish I could say it was life changing, but it wasn't. Neither was my infant baptism or my confirmation. The moment I shared with God on my sidewalk was life changing and I wish I had invited everyone I knew to witness my baptism, in that moment, to show the huge change I felt in my heart. What it did accomplish, however, was that I looked a little more like Jesus. He was baptized and now so was I. That was meaningful to me.

I want to be more like Jesus. I really want to hurry that process along. This weekend we heard the call from the altar, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near!" I feel that sense of urgency more and more. I am frustrated and annoyed by what I perceive to be a lack of dominion over my sin. I get weary of the "Oops, I did it again," that seems to be the revolving door of my sin pattern. I feel mournful and sorrowful when I look at the sin that still shows up in my life both by choice and by weakness. It's not guilt that I feel, but disappointment and failure. The more I get to know Jesus, the more I am aware that I can't

be holy without Him and the more deeply moved I am by my salvation through His sacrifice for me. If I don't acknowledge my sin and seek the Lord to fix it, then I cheat myself of receiving His grace. Communion has become this sweet moment between the Lord and I where I get to first acknowledge and confess where I have fallen short and then be completely blown away by His never ending grace. This hymn perfectly relates this concept for me:

*What love could remember no wrongs we have done?
Omniscient, all knowing, He counts not their sum.
Thrown into a sea without bottom or shore,*

*Our sins they are many, His mercy is more!
What patience would wait as we constantly roam?
What Father, so tender, is calling us home?
He welcomes the weakest, the vilest, the poor,
Our sins they are many, His mercy is more!*

*Praise the Lord! His mercy is more!
Stronger than darkness, new every morn,
Our sins they are many, His mercy is more!*

*What riches of kindness Christ lavished on us,
His blood was the payment, His life was the cost!
We stood 'neath a debt we could never afford,
Our sins they are many, His mercy is more!*

*Praise the Lord! His mercy is more!
Stronger than darkness, new every morn,
Our sins they are many, His mercy is more!*

*Praise the Lord! His mercy is more!
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My desire to be holy is not to earn that salvation or grace but it is a result of being in a deep relationship with my Lord. I want to honor Him, show Him respect, and I desperately want to please Him, to do His will, be part of His plans, and for Him to be proud of His child.

I was deeply encouraged by a quote I heard this weekend, "If you aren't struggling, then you aren't growing!" Maybe I can view my "struggle" as growing pains rather than as a constant failure on my part. Jesus tells us to remain in Him and He will remain in us and maybe that is enough for the day-to-day grind of being in a sinful world. Maybe the act of taking up my cross daily and following is enough until the day He returns to take us all home. Because, friends, we get to go home in the end and our sin no longer determines that because we belong to Christ.

Questions for deeper discussion:

- 1) "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near!" What does this stir up in you? What does this mean to you in your life right now?
- 2) Do you have a moment in your life where you "changed your mind and purpose as a result of new knowledge"?
- 3) What does it mean for you to take up your cross and follow Jesus? Are you struggling and growing?
- 4) Share your baptism story with your small group or a friend.

