

The 3 Rs: Repent
Mark 1:14-15
Sunday, August 2, 2026

How many of y'all have ever been lost? And I mean, *really* lost. You don't know where you are or have any idea of how to get to where you're going?

Now, I'll go ahead and apologize to the men who are here ... you can take my man card if you want ... but I admit it: sometimes I get lost. As many of you know, I like to backpack. And some of those hikes are out in the middle of nowhere. I'll be following the trail, or at least what I think is the trail, and then it just suddenly stops. I realize I took a wrong turn somewhere and there I am, out in the middle of nowhere, lost.

Now, objectively, this shouldn't be a big deal. I've usually got three separate GPS units with me, as well as maps and a compass. But still. There's always that moment of pure panic when my stomach just drops. What if I can't find my way back to the trail? What if I'm stuck out here forever?

Well, that's kind of what's going on in this scripture. In many ways, this particular verse in Mark's Gospel marks a turning point in the Bible; actually, a turning point in human history.

So, let's take a minute to look at what the Bible has to say about human history. And, as I often say, the story starts with the fact that we were created in the image of a supremely good and loving God. We were created to love and trust God and one another.

Unfortunately, we as a race have chosen instead to place our primary trust in ourselves. The story of Adam and Eve illustrates this: God told them not to eat the fruit, but they figured

they knew better. So, instead of living in the divine relationship of love for which we were created, humanity is fallen. Left to ourselves, we are alienated from God. Left to ourselves, we are all lost.

But, thankfully, we *aren't* left to ourselves. God has mounted a rescue operation to save us from ourselves. It began in the book of Genesis with Abraham and his descendants, the Israelites, who came to be known as the Jewish people. They were to be a special, set-apart people; a people who showed the world what it looks like to live the way we were created to live. But, as we read in most of the rest of the Old Testament after the book of Exodus, the Israelites kind of dropped the ball. They didn't really live any differently than the people around them.

And so, along came the Old Testament prophets. The prophets acknowledged the failures of God's people, but they also told the people not to abandon hope. They pointed to a future Messiah, a rescuer, who would usher in God's true kingdom and bring God's people into proper relationship with God.

And the reason this scripture is such a turning point in human history is that in it, Jesus is basically announcing that **he's** that Messiah. There's no more waiting. The time has been fulfilled. Jesus has come to introduce and establish God's kingdom here on earth.

But here's where things get interesting. Because Jesus' people, the Jews, figured they were God's *only* people. They were imagining God's kingdom as the typical human political and military organization of their day. They figured the Messiah would come, lead them in the overthrow of their enemies, and the result would be ... God's kingdom, with the Jews in charge.

But in this scripture, Jesus is saying that's not how it's going to work. He tells the people that for God's kingdom to come, they're going to need to repent.

Which calls to mind my first visit to the Alamo on a 7th grade field trip. Now, I hardly remember anything about the alamo, or about the rest of the trip for that matter. The thing I remember with almost photographic precision, however, is the guy outside the Alamo with the bullhorn. He was yelling through that bullhorn at everyone who walked by that we all needed to repent or we were going to go to hell. And he gave lots of examples of the stuff that we needed to repent from, which, to an impressionable youth like myself, was a little shocking. The overall impression I got from bullhorn guy was that being a Christian was all about repentance and repentance consisted almost entirely of beating myself up for being such an evil, despicable person.

I think a lot of us have heard that kind of thing, and it makes us kind of hesitant to want to talk or even think about repentance.

Which would be ok, except for one thing. As we see in today's scripture, repentance is pivotal to the "Good News." It's so pivotal that it's part the first thing Jesus says in Mark's Gospel. Jesus says, in essence, "the Good News of God's kingdom is here in me, and for you to be a part of it, you're going to need to repent." Repentance and the Gospel can't be separated.

Which leaves the question, what does repentance actually mean?

Well, going back to the Old Testament, the word for repentance is *teshuvah*, which means basically "to return;" to turn away from selfishness and wrongdoing and turn back towards God.

And regret for the bad things we have done is certainly part of that idea, but it isn't the point of it. The Jewish idea of repentance wasn't about wallowing in self-loathing. Instead, it was about recognizing we're on the wrong track and taking action to get ourselves on the right track. It's like when you get lost hiking. It's about that initial recognition that you're lost, but more importantly, it's about doing what needs to be done to get yourself unlost; getting yourself back on the trail. And you can't do that until you are willing to admit that you *are* lost.

It works the same way in our spiritual lives. We've got to acknowledge that we *are* broken—we've got to admit that we are not living the kind of lives God created us to live—before we can even recognize the need to do something different.

But there's actually more to the idea of repentance than just the recognition of how far we are from our home in God's divine love. Because the *Greek* word that Mark uses for "repent" in this scripture is "metanoia," which basically means to change one's mind. And he's not just talking about deciding to go to the Mexican restaurant instead of getting barbecue.

Some of the major Hebrew prophets, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Isaiah, talked about how when the Messiah came, God would put a new heart in God's people. The apostle Paul says basically the same thing in verse 2 of chapter 12 of his letter to the Roman church, "Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your minds"

One of my favorite Christian writers, Dallas Willard, explains repentance in terms of reconsidering your strategy for living, or rethinking how you think. It isn't just the point at which you recognize you can't keep going the way you've been going. It's also the point at which you *commit* to the process of change.

And, as we'll talk about over the next several weeks, that process is the process through which we work with God to transform our minds and hearts. It's the process through which we are transformed more and more into the image of Christ; the process through which we get ourselves back onto the trail that leads us towards the reason God made us: to live in God's divine love.

But we can't get there without first recognizing we aren't there yet. We can't get there without repentance.