

Repentance: A Good Man is Hard to Find

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[0 : 00] Bill didn't get all of that quite right, as you can imagine. I have been at St. John's since 1981, and I've known a few people around here who know too much about me. They'd rather know less.

Let's see what the time is here. I came here in 1981, actually. I was working for a news agency, and they transferred me to Vancouver. And unfortunately, I left a parish in Toronto, Church of the Messiah.

I think it's one of two Anglican churches with that name, so named. I think there's one in New Zealand, and there is one in Toronto. And at one point, Dr. Westberg was a curate there, I believe. So I've known this good gentleman for a good long time. He shaped me in the faith by his preaching many years ago.

So I'm not sure if he'll take that well or not. And I believe he now teaches at a... He teaches, Dr. Westberg, at a good school in the United States, which I believe, I'll be corrected if I'm wrong, conferred an honorary degree on the gentleman to Dan's left, Dr. Packer.

[1 : 17] That's true, isn't it? That's right. So these are the people who write books, and I'm the guy who reads them.

And now they find out if writing books is really worthwhile by listening to a talk like this. I was at 7.30 Communion this morning.

As always, it's such a blessing in our new worship space. I appreciate, as the years go by, I appreciate more and more the rhythm of the Christian life, of the church's life, the now this, now that guidance of the church year.

Charles Taylor, the Canadian philosopher, and of course many others, he might call it this one of the last obvious public shadows in our culture of an older enchantment-laden view of the world. Of the world, you know, is really the issue of where we really are. This rhythm of remembering, of course, is to an end.

[2 : 25] It has a purpose. That's why we come to church. What is the purpose, the end, that we seek by this discipline of Christian, gospel, liturgical life?

And of course, this is crucial to ask this question, to review it on occasion. This is the chief thing, after all, that we want to know, isn't it? After all, the wrong remembering, the wrong enchantment, could be catastrophic.

Not all enchantment, not all remembering, is good, is it? We all need to know what in life to put aside, what to forget.

We need to know what enchantments are delusional and lead to bad places, what enchantments are very much worth our time. Cast away the works of darkness, O ye children of the day, says a great hymn.

Some things we need to remember, some things we need to cast away. Mr. Taylor, that great Canadian philosopher, speaks as a philosopher watching a rational planning culture, we might call it, which has put so much of the past out of mind.

[3 : 46] But the gospel would tell us that enchantments still abound in our world, and that they take many forms.

In the Bible, I hope you'll agree with me, if you don't, we can talk about this in the discussion time. In the Bible, they, that is to say again, enchantments, they are called idols, and they do enchant us. Keep yourselves from idols, says 1 John. Idols enchant. They seek these things to shape us into their very image.

They try to create us in their image. So Christian liturgical life is both, therefore, an enchantment, and we might call it a counter-enchantment.

Again, to what end? What purpose? And of course, there are various answers here, reflecting various histories in the church.

[4 : 49] We got a good dose of history stuff last week from Dr. Hindmarsh. And all of these answers, I'm going to rehearse just a few obvious ones. They bear a family resemblance, at least you would think so.

The ordered liturgical life of the church keeps one close to the Lord's grace-given saving sacraments, close to his body given, close to the saving waters of baptism.

On this view, the ecclesial life, the liturgical life in the life of the church is itself salvation. Obviously, we can call that the Catholic answer, can't we?

The Catholic answer with a capital C. Think of Trent. Think of Newman. Think of that whole rich tradition, that church. Or the ordered liturgical life here, we hear, keeps us close to the order of apostolic truth.

Another kind of specific emphasis. It unfolds salvation history liturgy and keeps one near, keeps one in, keeps one celebrating the life of justifying faith.

[6 : 13] Obviously, there, what names come to mind? I think Luther, Calvin, the great magisterial reformation people. Europe fought wars over those differing views of what the church's life should be.

Tragically, it wasn't the whole story, thank goodness, but those two views are really, I do share in a resemblance, but they're so different.

Or just one more, liturgical action puts us all in heaven, where we learn the life of heaven with saints, with angels, even with doctors of the faith.

Think the whole of one's sensory apparatus should participate in a new world when you come to church. Think the Eastern Orthodox, usually called the Orthodox tradition, that this understanding of liturgy speaks more fully to the gospel.

There's different variations on what liturgical life, what this enchantment, if I may call it that, is all about. And of course, variations on this theme are today repeating themselves everywhere throughout the world.

[7 : 35] There is Quaker quiet going on. It's hard to know about them, they're so quiet. There's Pentecostal enthusiasm, it's easy to know where those folks are. There's, again, Catholic color, Orthodox splendor.

Some traditions will emphasize what you might call Protestant pulpit propositionalism. Get this straight, folks. All of it ordered, all of it an ordered way of living.

All of this is an ordered way, proposed as such, an ordered way of living in the mystery of Jesus. Finally, I get to an answer. What's it all ordered to, liturgy?

Living in the mystery of Jesus. That is the end, is it not? The purpose of it all. There is where we are to find, there is the end of, may I call it, gospel enchantment.

An ordered liturgical intensity so that we may rehearse the gospel. Living in the mystery of Jesus. John calls that, abide in me.

[8 : 43] That's his language. Paul capitally talks about being in Christ. Christ in you, the hope of glory. Or the Lord says, take my yoke upon you.

Learn of me. Apparently, this life of rehearsing the faith sometimes will involve subtlety. The disciple is a householder, after all, dealing in treasures old and new.

We find that a very exciting thing for our Lord to have said. The soul, if you will, our internal architecture. Is that what it is?

It's meant to become, again, an ordered liturgical intensity itself. Are you that this morning? Maybe you need coffee to get there. But that's what we come to church for.

I want to be that. I want my life to be an ordered liturgical intensity. I want to get caught up in praising the Trinity. Always. Always.

[9 : 43] I'm preparing for heaven. Well, I'll do it always. And I'm going to do other things there, too, apparently. But if you want to know about that, you've got to talk to learned gentlemen over here after.

So today, just at this kind of, I thought of it this morning as a kind of, this is a transition Sunday liturgically. We're at the end of Lent.

We're getting near the end of it. We're actually on Palm Sunday. And, of course, Easter is on the horizon. So we're sort of in a very complex, interesting liturgical moment.

That thing we want to take in. I'm repenting and I'm coming to Jerusalem with my Lord and I'm anticipating the mystery of his resurrection. So, again, with all of that on the horizon, it may be good to look with one last bit of intensity, if I can call it that, at the whole story of Lenten repentance. Just one part of the liturgical life. I want to look at that today. Before we put it aside for feasting and singing on Easter Sunday, Lent, repentance.

[10:53] What is it all about? What is repentance? Why is it so urged upon us by the church's liturgy and by scripture itself?

How are we to understand repentance? Does repentance sometimes go wrong? How do we understand, again, this part of life in Christ?

This part of life in his mystery? Are we to be... This might be a bit of a strange thing to say, but I wrote it down, so I'm going to say it.

Are we to be enchanted by repentance? Do you think we should be? Or is repentance not just more of a release from those bad enchantments?

Not something to think about as we think about repentance in the church's liturgical life? So again, at the end of this season of Lent, today with you, I'd like to spend some time looking at repentance.

[12:03] Before we take one more step, let's say a word of prayer before we commit our work together in the gospel today before the Lord in prayer.

This is the colic for the Sunday next before Easter, commonly called Palm Sunday. Let us pray. Let us pray.

To echo Flannery O'Connor's famous short story by that name. Many of you are familiar with that short story and with Flannery O'Connor.

O'Connor was, just for a thumbnail sketch, a 20th century Roman Catholic writer. She was a woman of the United States South, much noted for her powerful, very powerful themes in her writings, meant, as you know, to those of you who are familiar with her writings at all, meant to shock a modern reader awake to transcendent mysteries.

[14:09] O'Connor's talk has become kind of common now. She was one of those people in the middle of the Bible. She was one of those people in the middle of the last century who realized the absence of a language of transcendence hindered the hearing of the gospel.

It closed life down. It closed life down. It made people dumb, she would have said, to not know a language of transcendence. She was not a woman to mention.

She was not a woman to mention words. I'm not going to say too much about her at all, but I take delight, maybe too much delight in being told that she was once asked by an interviewer if American schools stifled young writers.

And she replied that they don't stifle enough of them. That's a taste of the woman's personality.

Forgive a personal reference here, but I hope it brings out, I do this very quickly, it brings out what I want finally to say about, for me, the amazing, this amazing particular work of art by Flannery O'Connor, this wonderful woman, in her short story, A Good Man is Hard to Find.

[15:25] Again, I know most, many of you know it. Many times when I approach the holy table, I do ponder this story. Of course, not the whole thing.

Specifically, its famous ending. The story then, in painful praise, it's a rich literary piece of work, and it's got much subtlety in it, and this is only to get us to a famous one line in it, believe me.

It is a painful story. It's about a family, a mom and a dad, two kids, and a grandmother driving to visit some relatives across state lines, as they say in the United States.

And their trip ends in utter unspeakable horror. It is a horrible story. They are carjacked, I guess we call it these days, by escaped convicts.

Vicious people escaped recently from a prison, and they precede these convicts to systematically execute each member of the family.

[16:30] Flannery tells lovely bedtime stories. The grandmother is portrayed throughout the story. She's the last member of the family to be brutally shot and left in a ditch.

She is portrayed as a person of incessant chatter in her life. She is, of course, on the verge of insanity, actually, as the nightmare unfolds before her of all the members of her family being killed. After she is killed, the chief psychopath, if I may call him that, says to his fellows, and these are my words. These are the words I do meditate on sometimes as I come to the holy table.

So these are my words here. But O'Connor would want her readers to absorb her thought for themselves and make use of them. He says, again, the psychopath to his buddies, after they've just

murdered a family, he says to her, well, she needed someone to shoot her every day. You've got to know the kind of shatterbox strange woman she was. And he just has killed her. She needed someone to kill her every day. Well, I ask the question, is that not Lent, really?
[17 : 50] I think it is, obviously. I think that's Lent. I think that's what Lent means, you know. Is that not what it means to come to the holy table?

Are we not invited to participate in the Lord's death, as Paul would say? Do I need someone to shoot me every day? I think the gospel says, in so many words, yes. I think God says to me, I need to put you to death. That's the thing you most need in life. That's what Lent says to me.

I need someone. This changes, of course, brings it into the sphere of the gospel. But I need someone to give me the gift of a good death. That's what Lent is about.

Again, when Beth and Manya talked to us a couple of weeks ago about stories for little children, Flannery O'Connor's name did not come up. Imagine a pop-up book telling this story.

[18 : 56] Give it to people you don't like that much. She's not writing for children, Flannery O'Connor, nor is she really writing for her fellow Christians. Perhaps she writes for Christians if their faith has become stale and it needs a shocking wake-up.

You need to be put to death. God comes into the world and says, this I have to give you. Didn't come to tell you you're nice. No. I have to hijack your life and put you to death.

This is, as mentioned before, of course, it's meant to be, I'm not going to talk again too much more about Flannery O'Connor, but her writing is meant to be wildly disorienting.

I think like Lent. Is there really some parallel between a murderer putting people to death and the Lenten season, which tells us to learn, to learn, to share in, to be one with, to participate in the mystery of the death of Jesus?

Well, I suppose the gospel answer, some attempt at a full gospel answer to be yes and no. Yes and no. Repentance starts out, I take it, as a kind of, I'm sorry I did that kind of thing.

[20 : 16] It starts out kind of simple. That's street-level understanding of repentance. I'm sorry I did that. But it moves on, if we are willing, to a complete decentering of ourselves, to strange and strong re-evaluations of ourselves.

It is no accident, is it not, that John the Baptist, the one we think about during the Advent season of the liturgical life of the church, he is a wild and strange character.

This is noted by us often, but I think it means more than meets the eye. He's an outsider, John the Baptist. He eats and dresses strangely, but he intrudes, doesn't he, into people's lives.

He intruded into the life of Israel, and he says, repent, and to prove it, let me plunge you into the waters of death, into the waters of baptism.

He might be saying to us, you need someone to shoot you every day, really. You notice how John does preach a baptism of repentance.

[21 : 37] A baptism, let me put you into death. The gospel is filled with repentance talk. John, again, famously, he came preaching a baptism of repentance.

A death that is shaped by repentance. Repentance, publicly stated by baptism. Jesus, his whole ministry was the time is fulfilled.

Repent. Repent. And at the end of the Bible, the theme of repentance still doesn't go away. The church of Laodicea is told, be zealous and repent.

The church is told to repent by Jesus. Repentance is meant, obviously, to search us out. It is meant to disapprove of us.

Repentance is disapproval. It intrudes like a thief into our lives. It's something we're not too comfortable with, but there it is. It's even like a killer, repentance, who might have to shoot you.

[22 : 41] Bruce Heinemarsch. Bruce Heinemarsch. I mentioned him earlier. He brought Thomas Akempis to our attention last week, didn't he?

In *The Imitation of Christ*, that book he was talking to us about, which had such an impact on early Methodism. It was fascinating the way Bruce brought that out.

In that book, it highlights a tradition of inwardness. It represents a tradition of inwardness. I hope you've read *The Imitation of Christ*.

In books like *The Imitation of Christ*, there are some strange counsels, I would call them recommended. Sometimes, simple, everyday, verbal interaction, as we call it in our dull language these days, simple talk between people, is warned against by these writers.

Have you ever read *The Imitation of Christ*? Sometimes there are intensities there that Christians back away from. I think probably wisely. It seems extreme at times, the advice of these spiritual writers, and more than seems.

[23 : 55] There are traditions of silence, for instance, in monasticism, which I'm quite certain are quite distorted. But, these teachers are nevertheless so very good.

Yes, we do sin all the time, for instance, in our speech. These older writers were very high on this. Thomas Akempis certainly was.

It reminds you that someone once said, Who was it? Every idle word will be judged. Every idle word?

Isn't that extreme, Lord? Every idle word you speak will be judged. Our speech should be gracious, seasoned with preserving power.

That's what Paul calls salt. Seasoned with salt. The tongue is a fire, James. Are you aware of that today over coffee?

[24 : 59] I can suddenly become a flamethrower with my speech. It seems so innocent, our conversation. And suddenly it turns deadly.

It kills someone. Does my speech need to be put to death every day? I think it does, in its own way. Jesus needs to say, Your speech needs to be murdered. It's so ugly and horrible. I wish someone would shoot you every day. Your speech is so destructive. Lord, repentance reminds me, Lord, I should pray, Heal my speech.

Heal my speech. I don't know what to do. I can't look around the corner here. Thank you.

Repentance, you see, it starts out as, Oh, I'm sorry I did that.

Now I'm beginning to realize repentance is no passing thing. John the Baptist says to Israel again, Repent. Start out again. Repent.

[26 : 00] Repent. Jesus summarizes His entire message as, Repent. The time is fulfilled. God's kingdom is about to arrive. And the first thing isn't great.

It's, no, repent. Put yourself to death. Please. The kingdom is at hand. Those whom I love, the Lord says to a church, I love you.

I reprove and I discipline you. So be zealous again. Be zealous and repent. Learn to love a good kind of death. You're not what you should be.

You need someone to kill you every day. I think that woman's got it right. Do you know 2 Corinthians 7.10?

I do because I recently looked it up. Paul, there's a lovely passage here that we're just going through very quickly. You know, in the Corinthians drama, there's times when Paul and this congregation are deeply alienated, troubled, working at a relationship.

[27 : 08] And here's a summarizing moment in 2 Corinthians when Paul is talking about their relationship. For even if I made you sorry with my letter, he refers to a letter that he's written to them, I don't regret it.

Though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now, though, I rejoice not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner that you might suffer loss, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.

For, and here's the heart of what I bring to our attention this morning, and you know this passage, it's a wonderful moment in Paul, for godly sorrow produces repentance, leading to salvation, leading to salvation, not to be regretted.

But the sorrow of the world, apparently there's a kind of parallel sorrow to godly sorrow. Paul calls it here the sorrow of the world. It produces death, he says.

[28 : 19] For observe this very thing that you were sorrowed in a godly manner. And then he describes repentance. What diligence it produced in you. What clearing of yourselves.

What indignation. What fear. What vehement desire. What zeal. What vindication. In all things, you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

Paul presents here repentance as obviously there, doesn't he, as a passionate thing. Godly grief, he says, produces a repentance that leads to salvation.

Whereas worldly grief produces death. standing alone, isn't it true, there is so much wisdom in those words. Again, in its first meaning, if I may call it that, Paul here addresses no particular person at Corinth.

It's interesting. Rather, he speaks to this congregation and its struggle to obey, to follow, and to please an apostle of their Lord.

[29 : 26] Godly grief, you can urge yourself towards the mind of Christ about something as an individual and as a congregation.

This godly grief is what shapes godly repentance. Godly grief is what? I take it it's seeing a gap, a breach, but a bridgeable distance and desiring strongly to build that bridge.

in this Corinthian passage, Paul describes this experience, doesn't he? So wonderfully, it seems to me, that, am I imagining this?

That you just know as a reader of that passage that we hear in this some of Paul's own experience, I take it. Paul knew from experience this kind of repentance.

Isn't it wonderful? Godly grief does not produce a sighing resignation. No, Paul describes it as producing, remember, eagerness to clear yourselves, getting something straight, I take it Paul means there.

[31 : 04] Eagerness to do that. It produces indignation, it produces fear, it produces longing. He even calls it, he says, what zeal, what punishment.

It seems as if Paul thinks that when there's something wrong in your life, it's as if you want to get it aside somewhere and punish it. You want to put it to death, I think.

You want to shoot it every day until it's out of my life. Repentance is obviously, for Paul, a passion. I take it it's a passion for John.

Repent, Israel. God is about to arrive. Repent, says Jesus. The kingdom is about to arrive. To a church, not, hey, get some things straight, you know, form a committee and see if you can sort of straighten out some of the messes there.

No, he says, be zealous. Get serious and repent. It's a passionate thing that we've been doing during the Lenten season.

[32 : 10] Godly grief produces a repentance which seeks out a full reformation. Have you been doing that during Lent? I know I need to do more of it.

It wants this full reformation badly. If it must come to this, it might involve someone, you're getting tired of this, I don't, I love it so much.

It might involve someone shooting you every day. Well, so be it. repentance is zeal. Repentance is indignation against evil.

Repentance desires to punish evil. I want to become a hater of my sin. I want to hate it. I don't want to say, well, you know, put it aside.

No. Kill it. Put it to death. It's that bad a thing. If you don't kill it, it will probably kill you.

[33 : 13] It's serious business, repentance. In which case, maybe we should rethink this repentance thing. It is instructive to remember that a life which rejects repentance is as simply unworthy of a human being, is powerfully present in our world.

to make a long story short, as time moves on, you know this name. I hope you know this name in some ways.

The famous philosopher Nietzsche, he would tell you never to say no to anything in your past. He would say, Jesus and John the Baptist are just wrong.

Don't listen to them. don't listen to the Christian tradition. Don't listen to the Christian church. Don't pay any attention to the Christian liturgy. It's bad for your mental health.

Bad, bad, bad. Get it out of your life. Much in our culture is trying to get this out of its system. I think our whole education system is trying to build people up rather than shoot them every day.

[34 : 26] There you go. Those teachers, where do they get these ideas? No. Nietzsche says, don't do this. What you should say about everything in your past is something like this, and I know because he says it, thus I willed it.

Everything in my past, I willed it. The past is your fate, and you are strong when you affirm. That's the modern sovereign self speaking.

Nietzsche was one of its great articulators. He was profound that man. He was way ahead of his time. An old Christian war horse like Bernard Ram used to apparently say to his students after he would unfold to them Nietzsche's worldview, and they were appalled at it, he'd say, Nietzsche was the kind of man who really, at his best, desperately wanted to know the truth.

Are you in love with the truth that way? There's something in Nietzsche. He was powerful. He saw what the options were. Christianity is a putting of yourself to death.

It doesn't affirm you. No, it puts you to death. Want to feel good about yourself, C.S. Lewis said, get a bottle of scotch. He meant it.

[35 : 45] That's the best man. Christianity doesn't come to you with sweet words to make you feel good about yourself. No, it wants to put you to death. Nietzsche saw that and he hated it.

A Christian knows that this Nietzschean view of things is nonsense, but alas, a strong enchantment is here and it's working its way through our entire culture.

Self-asserting moderns agree with a mad philosopher they have never heard of, or if they've ever heard of him, they largely forget him, but he's basically an enchantment that takes over their lives. Assert yourself. Feel good about yourself. You're great. Be who you are. Have a lifestyle. That word comes right out of Nietzsche.

Ah, my lifestyle. My lifestyle. None of this. I need someone to shoot me every day. A strong enchantment needs a strong counter enchantment.

[36 : 46] O'Connor knew what moderns were coming to. And she was trying to say, wake up, here are the options. Self-asserting moderns, again, have it completely wrong.

Everything Nietzsche said is, I'm going to get off him very soon, everything is flux, Nietzsche believed. That was his final understanding of the world, which controlled everything that there is in the world.

Everything is flux, but nevertheless assert yourself and by magic, we would say maybe by enchantment, you produce value, your very own, not someone else's, your own values.

This is, in fact, a ridiculous contradiction. If everything's in flux, you can't really assert anything because it'll be in flux too, but this contradiction at the heart of, at the very heart of the will to power, as Charles Taylor magnificently shows in his writings, I love this man, but Nietzsche just, as Taylor says, never bothered about contradictions.

The sovereign self lives, after all, by its assertion of itself. It's nonsense intellectually, but it's what human beings in modernity have come to.

[38 : 01] Forget about repentance, live by self-assertion. Put aside this Jesus and John stuff. It's nonsense. Get on to self-assertion.

Repentance presupposes simply, as I draw to a quick close here, another world of meaning is proposed to us by a repentance view of the world.

We are, back to meat and potatoes basics here, we are created. We do not come from a flux.

As gift from a giver, our existence is fundamentally gratitude. That's the Christian view of creation. You are a gift and you are, when you're spiritually whole, you are gratitude. You are not a self-asserting Nietzschean.

[39 : 06] You put that to death every day. You kill that. No, I am gift and as such, I am gratitude.

That's the very meaning of what it means to have a creator. As gift from a giver, our existence is gratitude. When we cease gratitude, we lose our humanity.

Give thanks for all the trees in the garden, all the trees that God has given us to enjoy. Listen to your creator who forbids one tree.

This prohibition sustains the mystery of listening. Gratitude for existence, listening to God's word. There's how we were created to live.

That is a wonderful description from a wonderful writer of what Genesis is saying. You were given existence, say thank you, and enjoy all that God gives you in the garden.

[40 : 16] But you must live not as a sovereign self, but as a listener. That's why God gave one no. Just live by listening. Live by gratitude and listening.

Adam and Eve refused. That's why the world is the way it is. So the Bible tells us. Give thanks for all the trees in the garden. Listen to your creator who forbids one tree.

This prohibition sustains us. We are to listen to God's word. When this order again, the order of gratitude and listening, when this order is refused, we become disordered.

History is this disorder. You and your humble speaker are disordered. We live in this disordered.

And until we repent, we will never return to the order that God has for us.

We need to repent. We need perhaps even to come to the day when we can say, thank goodness my creator came to me and has put me to death.

[41 : 27] That's just what I needed. I didn't need someone to come to tell me, you're great. Affirm yourself. No, he said, I've come to kill you.

You need to be put to death. That's what you need. Christian repentance is not in principle.

Christian repentance is not Christian repentance, therefore, if it's not understood within the order of the creation itself. Christian repentance is not Christian repentance is the practice of a renewal in gospel intensities.

Isn't it? We need not to put ourselves to death, we need someone else to do it. We need to relearn gospel intensities. Since I've been put to death in baptism, since I received the Lord's death at his holy table, I must continue to die to what is not consistent with his upward call in Christ Jesus, as Paul calls it.

And with thanks precisely at this point to I must mention an author, as Bill says, Harvey likes to read books, so I like to mention authors, to a regent graduate who went on to St.

[43 : 02] Andrews and did a doctorate there, to Julie Canlis and her book Calvin's Ladder, which is in turn a book based upon the second century church father Irenaeus.

We are, as Julie Canlis unfolds this, we are on the way to learning a new way. We are taught to learn to bear in the Christian life, learn increasingly to bear God's presence.

That's why this other self that we are, it can't bear God's presence. We need to have it killed every day and then we're reborn and we begin our ascent to the father.

Why ascent to the father? Because that's where Jesus went. the liturgical year will get us around to our Lord's ascension and he's gone there because he's taking us there.

He's teaching us along life's way to bear the mystery of God's presence. He bore it perfectly and went to his father and now we're learning that too.

[44 : 17] A key component of this, learning to bear God's presence, is learning to die. Lord, put me to death.

Lord, yes, I want to be baptized. I want to receive your death in the holy table. Again, a specifically Lenten theme, a Lenten intensity.

It's not the whole Christian life. We get around to singing joyously. So we learn to bear our new selves in Christ. This is why, again, the Christian life is a way.

There is no instant salvation. Here's where, Prince, the model that I bring with me, these little words I bring with me to the holy table, need to be furthered and made richer in the gospel.

There is no, in fact, no instant salvation. You might call that the popular, evangelical, catastrophic error. There is no, I'm saved.

[45 : 20] No. No. No. You learn to bear God's presence. No. No easy sanctification. No, as the tradition has learned to say, no cheap grace.

No. Adam was created in a relationship. He was called to grow in a relationship. And Christ Jesus has perfected Adam.

Adam. And in the second Adam, we must grow. And hence, that growth means we must learn not only to repent, but to glory in repentance.

From one degree of glory to another. That this is a gift in the gospel, this repentance. repentance. So, maybe, again, we just might learn to rejoice at the call to repent.

Or better, as we draw to a close, I promise, with another church father, I mentioned Irenaeus, a wonderful church father of the second century, another church father said that when burdened by sin, when you are tempted to despair, and perhaps the idea that, oh, I need someone to shoot me every day, that's not a psychological thing to hear, it's just an objective fact about you.

[46 : 48] It's not meant to get you down, it's not meant to hurt you, it's meant to lift you up, because when we're tempted to despair because of our sin, we remember that, as the church father says, forgiveness has been raised from the dead.

Imagine calling our Lord forgiveness, that is brilliant. Forgiveness has been raised from the dead. there, our repentance starts with, really, the liturgical years, that Christ gives us the strength to become good repenters.

He calls us to repent, but he doesn't leave us alone in it. He gives us the strength to repent more and more, to learn to die every day. I die every day, Paul said.

Our Lord had a hard life. I think he died every day. Sometimes he had no place to lay his head. He died every day and the father raised him up.

Just again, I'm over, I'm done. That was about, we're in the liturgical turning point, Lent becomes, Palm Sunday looks forward to Easter, and just one last look at how the repentance thing sort of fits into that whole mystery.

[48 : 03] it isn't the world's repentance, is it? It has to do with who we are, who we are created to be, how salvation works, and how we're being transformed.

And repentance is just one part of that. I'm sure I often, some of this is, there's so much about repentance I don't know. There's just a touch of it.

I'm sure many could add a lot of wisdom to the little I've gleaned about repentance. But that's what I wanted to share with you today. So I hope we have a good time for Congress where Bill says I'm okay.

It's the first time Bill's ever said that to me. But I want to bring us down to us, I want to say a closing prayer, and then some conversation about repentance and its mystery in our lives in Jesus.

So let me say a word of prayer. Lord, we thank you that you give us many gifts. The gift of a church family, the mystery of the gospel, so much of it that we have to learn.

[49 : 10] Make us wise in these things. Anything we've heard today, Lord, that isn't good for us, just sweep that away from us. Anything that is gospel truth, let us hold on to it. It may bring glory to your name and blessing to each of us.

We pray this in the name of forgiveness who has been raised from the dead, Jesus Christ. Amen. That was a mouthful, people.

Thank you for your patience. What did Nietzsche believe happened after that? Well, sort of, two things.

I would say really oblivion, but he did hold the doctrine of eternal return. He blinked at the end, if you want to be a bit, maybe unfair to Nietzsche.

Yeah, I think the prospect of eternal oblivion maybe was too much for him to take. So he thought, oh, everything might repeat itself. This flux is going to be an eternity of time.

[50 : 23] Everything is going to happen again. That's what he believed. I'm not sure if a man can really believe that. Maybe Nietzsche really believed it. I bet he you're saying about no instant salvation.

Suspicious. Suspicious. Yeah. Well, the Holy Spirit is working with us, I think, before we get to that state. Oh, yeah.

I don't mean to be a troublemaker. I'm with Kierkegaard. You know, Kierkegaard was, when he read that stuff in the book of Acts, about the hundreds being added to the church daily, he said, oh, what was going on there?

I mean, I think our tradition emphasizes maybe that too much. You know, the hour of decision stuff. It's good, but it becomes the sort of, oh, I know, but I'm sure you went through a long, a preparatory time.

No, I don't mean to be a, there are swift conversions. I won't deny that. I'm just saying that our tradition doesn't emphasize enough, perhaps, the struggles that some people go through to get to assurance.

[51 : 53] But there are theologians in the room who can answer these questions, don't worry. I won't mention any names. Oh, it's good.

Nietzsche's saying, you know, I willed it when he talks about months past, you know, I think in a Christian way, I mean, you know, whatever you set on fire with your words or actions, and it could be this morning, it could be yesterday.

I think it does help to take you full responsibility for sin, and I think that's actually very helpful in repentance when you say, whatever it is I did, whatever I willed it, I think that's going to help.

Oh, I agree with you, if we're saying, that was who I really am, but Nietzsche, as I understand it, does not mean that. He says, that's who I am, and I won't say I'm sorry.

I'm a masterful one in nature. I'm not a weak one who has to go back and rehearse failure. That is for weak ones, Nietzsche would say.

[53 : 03] So. Yes. Phil? Please go ahead. Oh, okay. What about people who are ultra-sensitive and they have this, you know, they call it guilt complex, and then they can't forgive themselves for certain things like supporting the First, Second World War, Korean War, whatever, and they've got this tremendous guilt-comer, because they were brought on the I shall not kill, they were brought up with the children, and it's a tremendous thing to realize you can be forgiven by how much that.

But to forgive oneself is very difficult because the sensitive mind of that person can be overwhelmed by what they had to give or to kill, and they know that that was really not what they wanted to do.

Well, yeah, I mean, part two of this talk would be something like, of course, what I've tried to indicate here is put repentance into the gospel.

It's not you and God. I wanted to go even further in critiquing our own tradition, Betty, but sometimes our tradition, it comes down to it's me and God. Right?

That's what my religion's about. I think we should get in the habit of saying never. You and God, that's hell. We are with God in Christ, and we never leave the mediating mystery of Jesus.

[54 : 32] It's never just us and God. God. So that person needs to hear the gospel more and more. That, yes, you're forgiven. Christ is healing you. The intensity of the glory of the gospel is going to be built into you.

That person needs to hear that and then become strong enough to maturely welcome repentance into one's life more and more. But you're right.

Of course, there are psychological dynamics that spiritual counselors and wise pastoral life is for. It isn't just, you know, here it is. We work at this, right?

So thank you for that good definition, that furtherance of it. Phil, I think, was next. I was going to say, RBI, very much appreciate your link between repentance and gratitude.

I'm wondering if you would say that we should be equally serious and deliberate, systematic, realistic, careful about exercises and gratitude as in repentance.

[55 : 41] Yes, we're returning. The second atom catches up all that was true in the first atom but heals it and perfects it.

Yes, created for gratitude, created for listening. We'll spend eternity in gratitude and listening. So that seems to me, Judy Canlis, as she unfolds, Calvin and Irenaeus on the garden, seems to be just simple and brilliant.

What is going on? Why does God give this prohibition? Was he toying with trouble for his creature? No. He was saying, I'm your creator.

Let's have a relationship in which we listen. listen. That's all that meant. But they said, no, we don't want to listen. We want to be sovereign selves.

And there's an ethicist in the room who will tell me if I've got this wrong, but I think it was Karabart who said, the evil one came down to me and said, why don't you become ethicists? Why don't you learn to discern between right and wrong?

[56 : 48] Be a sovereign self. Be a sophisticate. Rather than living in the sheer innocence of gratitude and listening, they decided to step out of that into sophistication and becoming sovereign selves.

Now, that's the whole story. Am I echoing your concerns there? Dan, you studied ethics professionally.

Is that what goes on in human beings? Is gratitude at the heart of our innocence and goodness?

Yeah, I think that's absolutely right.

The comment I was going to make, you know, the verse that I think sums up what you're trying to say to us and speaks to this question about the moment of conversion is Paul's I am crucified with Christ.

Nevertheless, I live. I am being crucified for Christ. I was crucified for Christ. So it speaks to that ongoingness.

[58 : 05] Daily dying so she's getting shot. That's the weakness of the Flannery O'Connor picture because it's over and done with, isn't it? For the grandmother and the family. Whereas in the Christian life, this psychopath follows you along like Swayne and says, yeah, even today, you've got to die again.

Sorry. You know? So there's a weakness in that picture, but I still like the language. I like the shocking language. I'm obsessed with this Flannery O'Connor thing.

I could perhaps find better ways to approach the holy table. You've got to think of something as you. I think adding to your point of your thing about instant salvation and that, if we remember handing out little pamphlets in the streets with this little South Asian bridge, people here, God here, then the bridge on the cross, and you have to go across the cross.

And a friend joked to me, he's not a Christian, and said, so I can just cross the bridge and take the cross away. Of course, that doesn't exist.

We have to be nailed down every single day and every single moment. And repentance is a reminder of that.

[59 : 28] Yes. Sarah, Bill. Amazingly, there's joy in this.

You showed it on your face as you made this video. I like to think of all psychopaths, Bill. I think it's nice guys.

There's joy in this. Well, yeah, I was trying to get around to that. Do we even welcome repentance after a while? I think John Stott, alas, the late John, John Stott used to say that he welcomed problems in his life.

I think he pondered that kind of thing because it made him go into a deeper lowliness, a deeper self-rejection. Very much an imitation of Christ theme.

Sorry if you didn't pick up on that and I hope those of you who are familiar with imitation, as Bruce Heinrich last week was talking to us about the imitation, right?

[60 : 36] Again, it's remarkable influence on early Methodism and that they, there is a, that represents a tradition of deep concern with things like your speech that you should always be careful of it and repenting of it all the time.

Because it's undoubtedly, even when you're unaware of it, you're probably, you're sinning with your speech. Wrong words, wrong emphasis, wrong timing. Oh, you know, it's a tradition of deep inwardness and self-questioning, which I think deepens our understanding of what repentance is, rather than, okay, I'm sorry.

These earlier spiritual writers were very much aware that these other dynamics are part of it. Lifelong, humility in one's speech. I think that can become a bit neurotic at times, I think.

I think that they weren't just perfect in their counsel there. But I see their point is very, very potent, I think. Let few of you teach, James says, because the teacher will be taught with greater, a greater judgment, a greater, what, discipline and eternity of some kind for the teacher's that, and here I am today talking away like this.

So, Bill, please. Professor. Professor. The room is awash in them.

[62 : 16] Your comments, I don't much appreciate it, Holly, they just seem so profoundly countercultural as to pose a conundrum for us.

As you know, the course at the university which is the most popular is Psychology 101. at which the concept of guilt is thrown away.

And here we are stuck with profoundly the need for repentance every day. How does this bridge get made in terms of communicating to the majority of our society that throws away the fundamental assumption?

who we are and what we need? Well, yes, the kind of thing as I understand it, Walker Percy, Flannery O'Connor, Christian writers, especially, I thought about when you're in a culture which is losing and or has lost the language of transcendence, how do you talk with them?

So, one answer, maybe it's too formal, but maybe on a university level it's not. You give them Flannery O'Connor who uses shock tactics to make you think about yourself in the world and what's going on here.

[63 : 50] That's an adequate answer. But that's a serious question. I think we need to have faith that the language of the gospel is ordained by God and has power to tear down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God and it will do that in time.

But we have to nevertheless be thoughtful about that. So I hear the question, it's completely true.

But you take the world at its face value that yeah, we have got this guilt thing behind us now.

We've got a handle on it. We're better than our forebears. We have psychology models to make the human being whole. I don't do you believe it?

It's a world of smoke and mirrors, psychology 101, in many ways.

woman in front of you has a question I believe. That would be Edie. I don't have a question. I have a comment. It stems from probably the longest conversation I ever had with Harry Robinson, who's a man of two words.

[65 : 10] He says that repentance is a gift and it's a place. And he describes it as a constant cleansing. Thank you.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Thank you, Edie, if that seems the unanswerable comment.

That's lovely. Shall I try and get this in the parish notes? What, this whole talk? Obviously not. Well, I don't know what to say about that.

It's marvellous, so. All right. And so.