

Repentance makes a comeback

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You know that moment when you tell your parents that you are ready to pay for your own car insurance? That you've decided to pay for your own cell phone plan? That you have your own health insurance? That you don't need them anymore? It's nice to be 45, isn't it?

Of course we still need our parents. We crave their love. We want their advice (sometimes). We are relieved to know that if this job doesn't work out they're probably still willing to let us move back in. Still, even if it's only a fantasy and even if it's only for a few months, it's nice to be independent. It's nice to have other options. It's nice to be in control—whatever that is.

Consider Sunday's Gospel lesson ([Matthew 3:1-12](#)). When John the Baptist saw the religious elites coming out to see his riverside revival, he cried out to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham." In other words, God doesn't need you. You might be the keepers of the tradition, the scholars of God's word, the ones chosen to propagate his name and word throughout the world, but God doesn't need you. If God wanted to, God could raise up your replacements even from these stones—these lifeless, hard, cold stones.

Your presumptions are getting in the way. Until you know that you aren't needed, you can't see the opportunity that is in front of you. God doesn't need you, but God wants you.

Repentance is a curious thing. We hear that word and imagine it coming on the lips of an angry preacher. It's so outdated, so old-school. Unlike straight-legged jeans and horn-rimmed glasses, there's nothing refreshingly hipster about it. But it's time for repentance to make a comeback. It's time for repentance to be the new cool. Because repentance isn't about feeling sorry for yourself. It's about turning around,

making a change, going back to the beginning, getting in touch with our roots.

The need for repentance isn't a simple diagnosis of all the things you've done wrong in your life. Sin isn't a list of misdeeds. The human condition is the wrong-way path that we are on. Repentance is the turning around that we need to get on the right path. As long as we have convinced ourselves that we are good and right, then we're on the wrong path. Until we see that we aren't the authority on all that is good and right, then we can't know how much God loves us.

God isn't asking us to be sorry before God will love us. While we were still locked in our backward, sinful ways, God sent Jesus to save us. That's how much God wants us. That's how much God is willing to give up to get us to turn around. The cross of Christ is God's way of reaching out to show us that the path of our own creation—of our own success, of our own independence—is a ticket to nowhere. And the empty tomb is God's demonstration that God's path leads to life. We can't get to peace and wholeness and joy on our own. Repentance is our way of saying to God, "I can't do this by myself." There's something refreshing about that.

Lots of things are making a comeback, ridiculous things that weren't that great the first time around and aren't really any better this time. (Skinny ties, anyone? Who thinks Spandex belongs at a dinner party?) But repentance is the ultimate retro. It says that things were better off back when we didn't wander off God's path. It's a return to our true roots as the children God made us to be. It's an admission that we haven't made things better for ourselves and that God's plan is better than our own. Isn't that a movement we can get behind?

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