

Luke 3:1-14

If there is one word which captures the theme of these weeks before Christmas, it's not *cold*, or *shopping*, or *baking*. It's not even *peace*, or *joy*, or words like that. It's *repent*. Repentance is the theme of Advent. And for us Christians, it is to be the theme throughout our life.

We all know people who need to repent. And we're only too happy to point this out to them. Oh, we do too. We need to repent. But not like some people. They're the ones going in the wrong direction; not me so much.

This is how we think whether we are willing to admit it or not. We're mountains and hills according to the prophet Isaiah: "*Every mountain and hill shall be made low.*" The higher up on a hill a person is, the better he can see everything that is around him. And so we are mountains and hills when we easily spot the sins in others. We raise ourselves up as judges. We see all the wrongs in everybody's life because we're high above them all.

"Get off your high horse!" is kind of similar to what the prophet says in our text. Christ, the true Judge, is coming. And He is swinging His axe. Unless we repent and get down from our high position, the axe of judgment will cut us off at the knees.

But then there are some who are valleys. They are down too low. That's me when I'm so weak in faith that God could never love me or forgive me. I'm a depression in the ground, too low even to be lifted up. When God's preacher speaks the words of Christ, I'm so far down in my misery that the words go over my head and they do not affect me. "*Every valley shall be filled,*" says the prophet.

So which one are you? A hill and mountain, or a valley? "Oh, I'm neither; I'm just as I should be." The one who thinks in this manner is not prepared for Christ to come - not in Judgment, not now in His Holy Supper and in His words of mercy and forgiveness. If you are as you should be, then why are you here? You don't need Jesus; you think you are Jesus. You don't need to repent; your life is without flaw.

Repentance is not an option. Unless you and I repent, the coming of Christ will mean nothing to us. The prophet John, in our text, speaks of bearing the fruits of repentance. He speaks of trees that either do, or do not bear fruit. This morning, since we're talking about the ground - hills and valleys, and such - let's think of a field and the fruits it bears: corn, beans, wheat. Weeds are not fruits, but this is what fields will bear unless they are worked. But fields do not work themselves. The master of the field, the farmer, must work the field. He plows it, plants it, tills it, and harvests its fruits.

Now it's a good thing that fields do not have nerves. Otherwise, when the plow blades through the field, it would react horribly. We do have nerves, and emotions, and pride. When God's Law plows into us, we don't much care for it. And so, many people, even church members, avoid the plow. They keep far away from it, or they shut their ears to it.

But you are not going to plow yourself. To be saved from the fires of Judgment, you and I must repent. But we cannot repent any more than a field can plow itself. Our Master must plow us with the word of His Law. He must raise us up from our valley, and He must bring us down from our hill and mountain.

Unless we are plowed, we will not bear the fruits of repentance, but we will bring forth weeds as unplowed fields. Now of course we think our weeds look just fine; but God doesn't. To repent means to change. There are things that need to change in your life and in mine.

Let's look at our love for God. We say we love Him, that we believe in Him. If we love God then we will love to hear and study His words to us, and we will love Him with our offerings back to Him. Let's not love God in word only. Bearing fruits of repentance means that changes will happen. These changes must also be in regard to our neighbor. If we love God, we will love those God places into our life. We will treat them with kindness and respect. We will forgive when they hurt us. Let's not just say that we are Christian people; let's live as God's people. Let's make changes in our life. This is how we bear the fruits of repentance. If we are unwilling to change, we are unwilling to repent.

But none of this will happen unless God works our field, and He only works it through the hearing and reading of His Word. This is His work within you right here and now. He plows your field. He creates within you a repentant heart. And He plants in you the seed of the Gospel. He tills it. He nourishes it. And He rejoices in seeing it bear fruit in your life.

The prophet John came, it says, "*proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*" Farmers do not plow their fields for the fun of it. They plow in order to plant the seed. That's why God plows us with His Law. He works repentance in us for the purpose of giving us the word of forgiveness.

This is why Christ came. The prophet John came to prepare the fields. Jesus came to make the fields beautiful with fruit. And this is who you are. You are beautiful fields, filled with fruit, because of Christ who comes to you.

He is up higher than all of us, but He does not see all the dirt in our lives; He does not see all the weeds in our fields because He sees with eyes of mercy. He comes to you to forgive you. He can do this, and He does do this because Jesus was raised up high on a hill called Golgotha. That was one barren mountain. There was no fruit there. It was filled with weeds - the weeds of your sin and mine. All those weeds - all our sin clung to Jesus on the cross. He became sin for us.

It was to this lonely hill that the axe came. God swung His axe at His beloved Son and cut Him away from the land of the living. Jesus, the Son of God, became, for our sake, the tree and the field that bore no fruit, but was filled only with weeds. And He, your Substitute, was thrown into the fire of judgment for you.

And so Jesus, my friend, fills up your valley, and Jesus makes your hill and mountain low. Whatever you have been is no longer who you now are. You are God's beautiful field, filled with fruits, filled with Jesus. God sees no weeds, no sin in your life, but He declares that you are forgiven, completely clean of all sin, for the sake of Jesus. Remember your Baptism into Christ. Here in these waters is the power to change. For here is God at work in you. He declares you His forgiven child in these waters, and He dwells in your heart in these waters bringing forth beautiful fruits in your life.

It's Advent. The farmer is plowing. We hear the plow and we feel its sharp blades. But that's why we repent. God plows us in love because Jesus, the Seed, is coming. And He is here now for you. He embraces you in mercy. He forgives all your sins. And He makes you, His field, beautiful with fruit. Amen.