

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jan 25th 2015

During the first part of January there is a lot of energy around New Year's Resolutions. People ask if you make resolutions. News outlets feature stories on how to make effective resolutions. People see this as a chance to attend to long neglected goals around health, finances, relationships. The fitness clubs are always their busiest right after the first of the calendar year. Organizing bins and brand new calendars fly off the store shelves. Yet as the weeks of January progress our resolutions are often left by the wayside. One poll indicates that so many people abandon their New Year's resolutions after 3 ½ weeks that this Friday, January 23, could be referred to as Fail Friday.

Today's readings are about repenting and changed identities and new beginnings. In the first reading when the people of Nineveh hear Jonah announce their city will be destroyed they drastically change their behavior. The Psalms cry for the Lord to teach us his ways. There is an urgency in the second reading from Corinthians which speaks about time running out. And in the today's Gospel from Mark Jesus proclaims the gospel to the people of Galilee: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

When I was younger I remember being afraid of the word repent. It was associated with dire consequences. I was sure there was a trick question involved and I worried that I would not know that I was not in God's favor. What if I had been a citizen of Nineveh and had my ear phones in so I missed Jonah's urging to change my ways?

Now as I look at the definition of repent: to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life, I have a different view. I trust in God's love for me and I believe God wants me to make the right choices. God is always speaking and I simply need to listen and trust in his ways. I also feel God's compassion when I fall short in my efforts.

It is no wonder New Year's resolutions are abandoned as they are rarely grounded in serving the kingdom of God. It is so easy to get wrapped up into the values of society and worry about appearance or financial wealth. When I reflect upon some of my sinful moments I can see how my choices are fueled by fervent rationalizations and misguided distractions. When thinking about a most popular resolution to exercise more: celebrating a healthy body by exercising more is not inherently a bad thing, but what a difference if our focus on physical exercise would be to grow stronger and to have more energy to better serve others.

So as I luxuriate in these days of ordinary time I ask myself these questions in prayer: What habits do I

have that call for me to repent and turn toward God? When I am motivated by ego or selfishness how can I become a more generous and loving person? How can I be more open to God's loving guidance to help me use my gifts and talents in service to my community?

I repent with my revised New Years Resolution from Psalms 25. Teach me your ways, O Lord. Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; Teach me your paths, Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior.

Mary Lee Brock - Creighton University Werner Institute