

**A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Repentance**  
**Second in a Series**  
**Second Sunday after Pentecost**  
**June 14, 2020**  
**Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin | Page 1 of 4**

**Psalm 120, Exodus 19:2-8, and Luke 13:1-9**

**II Cor. 7: 10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. 11 For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you,**

Dear Friends in Christ,

The author Eugene Peterson tells of a time when he was in the backyard with his lawnmower tipped on its side. He was trying to get the blade off so he could sharpen it. He had his biggest wrench attached to the nut but couldn't budge it. He got a four-foot length of pipe and slipped it over the wrench handle to give him leverage, he leaned on it as hard as he could, but no luck. Next, he took a large rock and banged on the pipe. By this time, he writes that he was "beginning to get emotionally involved with his lawnmower." As one would imagine, he was as irritated as he could be.

Until his neighbor walked over and said that he had a lawn mower like that once, and that if he remembered correctly, the threads on the bolt went the other way. He reversed the wrench, and sure enough, the nut turned easily.

In this case, Peterson notes, he was glad to find out he was wrong. As soon as he went the opposite way, as soon as he swallowed his pride and did a 180, his day took a dramatic turn for the better.

Psalm 120 is the song of a person who is thoroughly disgusted with the way things are going in life and is motivated to travel on a different path. Our topic today is repentance, as we continue a series of sermons with the theme, "A Long Obedience in the Same Direction." Last Sunday we focused on what it means to live our lives with the mindset of a pilgrim, and next Sunday we focus on the providence of Almighty God. Today we study the first of 15 Psalms which bear the title, Songs of Ascents. Pilgrims would sing these Psalms on their way up to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover or perhaps the Feast of Pentecost or perhaps the Feast celebrating the end of harvest.

Lutherans teach that repentance is comprised of both contrition, which is effected by God's law and faith, which is worked by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Law tells us what to do and not to do, but the Gospel shows us what God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ. The Law shows us our sin, but the Gospel shows us our Savior. The Law should be preached to everyone, and especially to those of us not repenting, and the Gospel should be preached to everyone, especially to those troubled in their consciences because of their sins.

Three lessons today on the subject of repentance, one each from Scriptures already read. First, we learn how repentance begins, secondly the direction in which it takes us, and finally how it is a proper response to every calamity that we face.

**A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Repentance**  
**Second in a Series**  
**Second Sunday after Pentecost**  
**June 14, 2020**  
**Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin | Page 2 of 4**

1. From Psalm 120 we learn that repentance begins with being **thoroughly disgusted** with the way things are.

Psalm 120 begins with the words, “I am in trouble” and ends with the word “war.” The Psalmist was surrounded by liars. Neighbors would smile face to face, but in fact they were lying through their teeth. He knew that the judgment of God was aimed in their direction, but he was looking for a better direction.

When he wrote that he was doomed to live in Meshech and cursed with a home in Kedar, he was complaining that his enemies were barbarians, they were unbelievers, and he wanted nothing to do with them anymore. Meshech was a far-off tribe that lived thousands of miles from Palestine in southern Russia; Kedar was a wandering Bedouin tribe of barbaric reputation along Israel’s border. They represent the strange and the hostile. Paraphrased, the cry is, “I live in the midst of hoodlums and wild savages, this world is not my home, and I want out.”

Isn’t that what many of us have been saying in recent days? Many of us are thoroughly disgusted with racial injustice and police brutality. Many are thoroughly disgusted with rioting and looting. Many are thoroughly disgusted with lack of respect for law enforcement. Many conservatives are thoroughly disgusted with liberals and vice versa. Many democrats are thoroughly disgusted with republicans and vice versa. In the one corner, folks are saying, I live in the midst of racial injustice and police brutality, this isn’t where I want to live, I can’t take it anymore. What we all have in common is that we’re sorry this world is in such a mess, we’re sorry that there is so much division, we’re sorry that our life together seems to be getting worse rather than better.

The kingdom of God is like a man who is losing his temper because he cannot turn the nut that would allow him to remove his lawn mower blade. It’s like a man who is thoroughly disgusted with how much weight he has gained. It’s like a woman upset with herself for spending too much money. It’s like a teenager regretting not standing up to the neighborhood bully. It’s like a rich person ashamed of the self-centeredness into which he has fallen. It’s like active members of the church troubled in their hearts over the lukewarm brand of Lutheranism they have been practicing.

Our first lesson focused on how sincere repentance begins, and the second is to note the direction in which it takes us.

2. ***From II Corinthians 7, we learn that Godly sorrow leads to Christ, as opposed to worldly sorrow which leads to death.***

Dear friends in Christ, the worst mistake we could make here today is to be disgusted with the behavior of others instead of our own. Repentance is about each one of us in every one of our days drowning the old sinful adam with all of its prejudices and bad attitudes so that the new life in Christ might rise up and be alive. Repentance is first of all about being sorry for the bad that I have done and the good I have failed to do. It’s about seeing the damage I have done with my wrong

**A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Repentance**  
**Second in a Series**  
**Second Sunday after Pentecost**  
**June 14, 2020**  
**Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin | Page 3 of 4**

behaviors, the damage I have done with my puffed-up perspective, the damage I have done with my know it all attitude.

Worldly sorrow is focused on other people being messed up; Godly sorrow is focused on me being messed up. Worldly sorrow is being sorry I got caught, Godly sorrow is about offending God Almighty. Worldly sorrow is being ashamed of society, Godly sorrow is being ashamed of me. Worldly sorrow leads to blaming and stereotyping and generalizing, Godly sorrow leads to inward examination, confessing, and the forgiveness of sins.

The kingdom of God is like a man whose neighbor helped him to see that he was turning the nut in the wrong direction. As soon as he reversed course, his day was easy. The kingdom of God is like a small group of believers driven to their knees by the condition of their world, they are longing for the peace that only their risen and ascended Lord offers. They are crying, they are rejoicing, and they are resting. Crying out for their Father in heaven to be patient with them, rejoicing that Christ richly and daily forgives all of their sins, resting in the salvation Christ has provided. Crying, rejoicing, and resting. Crying over the they trust.

**3. *From Luke 13, we learn that the proper reaction to every calamity is repentance.***

In Luke 12, Jesus had been teaching that the world was clearly moving towards God's judgment. He had warned the people of his day not to be like the rich but foolish man who was busy making money and unconcerned about his impending death. He ridiculed the folks who could read the weather signs but failed to read the signs of the times. He chastised the folks for showing wisdom in earthly matters but were blind and stubborn in spiritual things.

To which a few of them tried to argue that they were interpreting life correctly. They pointed Jesus to some Galileans who were murdered in the temple as an example of how God does indeed punish sinners. They were trying to prove that they were not as dense as Jesus was making them out to be.

Jesus responded by asking them if the few worshipers who were killed were worse sinners than those who weren't? Jesus rejected that conclusion and went on to cite another example of tragic death. 18 people were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them. Jesus asked if those 18 were more guilty than other people living in Jerusalem who were still living? Once again, Jesus rejected that conclusion. He rejected the idea that there is a connection between unusual earthly suffering and death as a specific punishment.

The correct interpretation of both events. "Unless you repent, you too will perish." Brutal murders, shocking accidents, death in all forms are proof that the souls that sin, they shall die. Death is one way God calls people to repentance lest they perish.

## **A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Repentance**

### **Second in a Series**

### **Second Sunday after Pentecost**

**June 14, 2020**

**Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin | Page 4 of 4**

400,000 people worldwide have died with Covid-19 and counting, 115,000 folks in the USA have died and counting. The sinful flesh would tell us to respond by running and hiding, the world would tell us to respond by staying home and being safe, the devil would whisper for us to be eating and drinking and being merry, our Lord Jesus would look us in the eyes today and say, Unless you repent, you also will perish.

George Floyd dies a terrible death, masses of people respond by protesting, others go further and respond by rioting, politicians respond by holding hearings, many respond by trying to do better, a few respond by arguing into infinity, Jesus would look us in the eyes today and say, Unless you repent, you also will die.

Peterson suggests that repentance is the Biblical word describing the no we say to the world's lies and the yes we say to God's truth. The whole history of Israel was set in motion by saying no to one place and yes to where God was leading. Abraham was called on by God to say no to where he was living, in Mesopotamia with all of its worldly wisdom and strength and yes to a land God would show him when he got there. In the days of Moses, Israel was called on by God to say no to Egypt where they at least had meat to eat and water to drink, and yes to a land God would show them when the time was right.

The kingdom of God is like a man who learned his lesson about how to remove a lawn mower blade. It's like a wise person who knows that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

It's like a congregation of believers full of folks less and less likely to point out the sins of others and more and more admitting their own. Less and less do they shake their head and cry out, "what's the matter with those people?" And more and more they look in the mirror and ask, "what's the matter with me?" As often as they step away from the lies of the world, that often they are able to take one step towards the very truths that set them free. As often as they give up on the idea that life is fine just the way it is, as often as they resist the notion of instant gratification, as often as they set their hearts on pilgrimage, that often they are able to practice a long obedience in the same direction.