

E-Series

Repent



**WRONG
WAY**

1 While Jesus was living in the Galilean hills, John, called "the Baptizer," was preaching in the desert country of Judea. 2 His message was simple and austere, like his desert surroundings: "Repent. Change your life. God's kingdom is here." 3 John and his message were authorized by Isaiah's prophecy: Thunder in the desert! Prepare for God's arrival! Make the road smooth and straight! 4 John dressed in a camel-hair habit tied at the waist by a leather strap. He lived on a diet of locusts and wild field honey. 5 People poured out of Jerusalem, Judea, and the Jordanian countryside to hear and see him in action. 6 There at the Jordan River those who came to confess their sins were baptized into a changed life. 7 When John realized that a lot of

*Pharisees and Sadducees were showing up for a baptismal experience because it was becoming the popular thing to do, he exploded: "Brood of snakes! What do you think you're doing slithering down here to the river? Do you think a little water on your snakeskins is going to make any difference? 8 It's your life that must change, not your skin! 9 And don't think you can pull rank by claiming Abraham as father. Being a descendant of Abraham is neither here nor there. Descendants of Abraham are a dime a dozen. 10 What counts is your life. Is it green and blossoming? Because if it's deadwood, it goes on the fire. 11 "I'm baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. The real action comes next: The main character in this drama - compared to him I'm a mere stagehand - will ignite the kingdom life within you, a fire within you, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. 12 He's going to clean house - make a clean sweep of your lives. He'll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he'll put out with the trash to be burned." **-Matthew 3:1-12 (The Message)***

Sunday we continued our discussion of Advent preparation. We are not just preparing to celebrate Jesus' first advent ("arrival" or "coming"). We are also preparing for his second advent. Of course we don't know when that will happen, but we know that he has promised to come again and we need to be ready.

The first week of Advent we talked about using the season of Advent to prepare by serving others. When we serve others, we are also serving God. And, we are transformed in the process.

Most recently, however, we explored another way to prepare: repentance. "Repent. Change your life. God's kingdom is here." That was John the Baptist's message out in the Judean desert. It was a message later echoed by Jesus. But what does it mean to repent?

It means more than merely confessing. As I said on Sunday, Governor Mark Sanford confessed. After the Appalachian Trail alibi didn't work, he admitted his affair. He confessed. Then he justified. He argued that it was "true love," that he and his Argentinean mistress were "soul-mates." So, he *confessed*, but he surely didn't *repent*. The word "repent" implies a change of mind, a change of heart, and most importantly a change of behavior. To repent is to make a U-turn, a 180, to go from heading in the wrong direction to heading in the right.

Repentance isn't easy. In fact, it is only possible by God's grace. It is a gift, a good gift. When you've been heading in the direction of death long enough, the possibility of a U-turn is good news.

On Sunday we talked about Tiger Woods. He is the sensational example right now, but his sin is certainly not extraordinary. Every single one of us is broken. Each of us harbors our own sin. A couple of weeks ago, it caught up to Tiger. In the course of a couple of days, he descended quickly from the top of the world. Can you imagine that place of frantic desperation when everything caught up with him? Can you imagine the panic, the desperate desire to make things right, but the utter inability to do so? I imagine it felt something like quicksand. When you're caught in quicksand the more you struggle and try to free yourself, the deeper and faster you sink. You are stuck.

I think that we've all felt that way at one time or another. Tiger probably feels that way now. All the golf championships and the gozillions of dollars can't buy him out of the fix he's in. If I were Tiger and somebody told me that repentance was possible, that I could make a U-turn and travel in the opposite direction from destruction, I would definitely consider that good news.

“Repent. Change your life. God’s kingdom his here.” That’s good news. The messiah has come and is coming. He makes possible a brand new life, a rescue, a U-turn. Thanks be to God!

Checking My Turning Radius,
Pastor Michael