

Missing the Target Second Sunday of Advent/B December 10, 2017 10:00 AM
Is 40:1-5, 9-11; 2 Pt 3:8-14; **Mk 1:1-8** (Sin is trying to make ourselves happy.)

“John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

Advent always involves the figure of John the Baptist, who was a cousin of Jesus and his forerunner. But what really was his mission? What was he really about? Mark says he preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Many of us think of repentance as basically a matter of being sorry or remorseful about past mistakes or even wickedness. Well, being remorseful of past wrongdoing is very commendable, but it isn't repentance.

Repentance is the Greek word, *metanoia*, meaning “to think beyond the boundaries,” to go beyond the boundaries of what people ordinarily think. So **it's a call to a radical newness.** John the Baptist is saying if you are going to accept a Christ, you have to start thinking in a radically different way about life, about God, about everything. This is why Jesus forbade Peter to call him the Christ because it would only lead to misunderstanding because what people would mean by it is not what he was. This is a very important insight: **Jesus didn't fit into his culture, and he doesn't fit into ours.** Jesus is something totally new and different, and we have to adapt to him. That is why it is perilous to modernize Jesus, to try to explain him in a way that is pleasing to the modern mentality. It will only get farther away from the goal. **So groping for new words is part of the gospel work,** groping for new expressions, finding new ways to say things. It's part and parcel of being a follower of Christ, of the real Jesus, whose forerunner was John the Baptist.

So if we are going to now **look at life in a new way,** and if we are going to **give ourselves permission to think in a way very different from the way we were raised or taught,** where

do we start? Well **Mark starts with this idea of sin.** We think we know what sin is, like Potter Stewart, who said he couldn't define pornography, but he knew it when he saw it. So we think that of sin too. Maybe that's true, but let's look a little deeper. **When we call something a sin we are actually talking about the result of a sin, not sin itself.** For example the breaking of the commandments, that's the result of sin; it isn't the cause of it. It isn't what makes up sin. In Hebrew and Greek both, **the word sin is the word for "missing the target,"** found for example in the sport of archery—missing the target. Well what's the target? The target God has given us in the creation of his own image and likeness, **the target is happiness, complete and total happiness. But that only can happen by God's design in union with the heart of God.** There is no other way it can happen—union with the heart of God. **Sin is trying to make ourselves happy.** And when you think about it, a lot of our lives are made up of trying to make ourselves happy. And how well are we doing? If we could make ourselves happy, then God would be superfluous. So the way God created us and the whole creation it's impossible. **It's impossible for us to be truly, profoundly, and deeply happy without God.**

So repentance for the forgiveness of sins means our recognizing in a very deep place within ourselves both God's great mercy and desire for us, and our complete and total need for God. Just imagine how much time, energy, and life people in the world waste by looking for a substitute for God. This is the tragedy of life. Jesus has come into the world, God becoming human, to enter into our life and show us what it means to really live, and how we can all enter with each other into the heart of the Father and dwell with God in eternity. So we all need to realize we need repentance for the forgiveness of sin.