



# Table Talk

The Second Sunday in Advent A

December 08, 2019

**Matthew 3:1-12**  
**“Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.” Vs. 8**



Relegating repentance to feeling sorry for your sin commits a grave error. Repentance is a more serious matter. It is death and new life. Repentance is being joined to the death of Christ (Ro. 6). Repentance is being drowned in the waters of baptism (Small Catechism). Repentance is the entire life of the Christian (Luther, 95 Theses). Repentance is Jesus’ call to come and die (Bonhoeffer). The death wrought by baptism is the death of the old person full of both vice and virtue. Jesus Christ comes and takes away that person’s future, leaving behind only mortal flesh, soon to go down to the grave. Jesus Christ then gives your mortal flesh the only life possible to it, his own. The Christian has no life except for the indwelling life of Christ (Gal. 2:20). All else is mortal and passing away and has no future.

This newness of life—which is the life of Christ in you—bears fruit. John the Baptist admonishes the Pharisees and Sadducees to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (v. 8). He does not mean for them to start exhibiting good works. Their hands were already full of good works. It’s no use to quibble whether

those works were the wrong kind of good works. Repentance is not meant to produce good works. Rather, repentance produces the fruit of faith. You, the unbeliever and idolater, are turned through death and new life into you, a believer in the one true God, Jesus Christ. This faith—the life of Christ in you—cannot be without fruit, the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

Thanks be to God that repentance is taken out of your control and given over to the work of the Holy Spirit. You, in the strength of your hands or the effort of your will, are unable to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. You cannot eschew vice and embrace virtue, equating those good works with repentance. That’s simply the Law at work and not the Gospel. When the Holy Spirit works through the Gospel, you are established in faith; you have the life of Christ; and the fruit of the Spirit flows effortlessly from his life and your hands. This death and new life is the repentance that bears the fruit of faith.

**Table Talk:** Discuss the dangers that come with equating visible good works with repentance.

**Pray:** Heavenly Father, so establish the life of Christ in me that, held in his faith, I may be confident that I’ve been repented. Amen

Written by Rev. Timothy J. Swenson  
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## John the Baptist Prepares the Way

1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,

2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

4 Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him,

6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”



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