

# **ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE**

## **Topical Bulletin, February 2018**

During this month we enter the season of the church-year known as “Lent” beginning on Ash Wednesday and followed by six Sundays in Lent, the last of which is also known as Palm Sunday, which is immediately followed by Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

**Lent** is properly defined as “a time for penitential reflection.” Webster’s New World College Dictionary defines **penitence** as “**the state of being penitent; repentance**” and subsequently notes that “**penitence** implies sorrow over having sinned or done wrong; **repentance** implies full realization of one’s sins or wrongs and a will to change one’s ways.” Nevertheless, Webster’s dictionary definition of *repentance* is actually woefully inadequate – Biblically speaking – when it comes to Christians rightly spending time in true penitential reflection throughout the Lenten season. Therefore, in view of the Holy Scriptures the following question will be addressed in this month’s Topical Bulletin: ***What is true repentance?***

Now, there are some practices commonly associated with Lent which have nothing to do with real repentance. For instance, some professed Christians hold that abstaining from beef, pork, and poultry while only eating fish during the Lenten season somehow pleases the Lord; however, there is no mention in the Holy Scriptures of such dietary restrictions by New Testament Christians being pleasing to God. Others think that by ceasing to eat donuts and other sweet treats during Lent they render satisfaction to God, while some hold that abstaining from all alcoholic beverages during Lent earns points with God. Nevertheless, all of the aforementioned practices of denying one’s self certain foods or drinks are not indicative of real repentance, “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” (Romans 14:17 KJV) Furthermore, the Lord plainly declares: “to this *man* will I look, *even to him that is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” (Isaiah 66:2 KJV) Observe that the Lord desires that we be humble, smitten with genuine sorrow over our sins, and fearful and respectful of His Holy Word.

**The Holy Bible actually uses the term “repentance” in two ways: in a narrow sense and in a wider sense.**

***Repentance in the narrow sense refers to contrition, sorrow over one’s sins.*** For example, after betraying Jesus, Judas Iscariot displayed repentance in the narrow sense of the term, for we read in Matthew 27:3-5, “Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What *is that* to us? see thou *to that*. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.” The phrase *repented himself* is a translation of the Greek root word μεταμελλομαι metamellomai {met-am-el'-lom-ahee} which means: “feel remorse, become concerned about afterward, regret. / Regret, repent.” [Friberg Analytical Greek Lexicon / Gingrich Lexicon] Thus, the repentance Judas showed was real enough sorrow but unfortunately was not coupled with faith in Jesus Christ, for in reference to His Apostles Jesus said to His heavenly Father: “While I was with

them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.” (John 17:12 KJV) The fact that Judas Iscariot is the *son of perdition* – the son of destruction in hell – is evident when we compare Acts 1:25, in which we read: “...Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.” Yes, Judas in sorrow committed suicide, self-murder, and went to his own place, hell. Note well that while Judas Iscariot’s repentance was indeed sorrow over his sin, his sorrow was not GODLY sorrow since it was not grief over offending God, as is evident in that Judas went on to further offend God by killing himself, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” (2 Corinthians 7:10 KJV)

***Repentance in the wide sense includes both contrition and faith— genuine sorrow over sins in that one has offended God, coupled with faith in Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior who has paid for all the sins of all people.*** For example, in 2 Peter 3:9 we read: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” In the foregoing Scripture passage the word *repentance* is a translation of the Greek root word μετανοια metanoia {met-an'-oy-ah} which means: “strictly later knowledge, subsequent correction; religiously and morally, as a change of mind leading to change of behavior— repentance, conversion, turning about. / Remorse, repentance, turning about, lit. ‘change of mind’.” [Friberg Analytical Greek Lexicon / Gingrich Lexicon]

The Lutheran Confessions therefore rightly state: “...the term repentance also is not employed in the Holy Scriptures in one and the same sense. For in some passages of Holy Scripture it is employed and taken for the entire conversion of man, as Luke 13, 5: *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.* And in chap. 15, 7: *Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.* But in this passage, Mark 1, 15, as also elsewhere, where repentance and faith in Christ, Acts 20, 1, or repentance and remission of sins, Luke 24, 46. 47, are mentioned as distinct, to repent means nothing else than truly to acknowledge sins, to be heartily sorry for them, and to desist from them. This knowledge comes from the Law, but is not sufficient for saving conversion to God, if faith in Christ be not added, whose merits the comforting preaching of the holy Gospel offers to all penitent sinners who are terrified by the preaching of the Law. For the Gospel proclaims the forgiveness of sins, not to coarse and secure hearts, but to the bruised or penitent, Luke 4, 18. And lest repentance or the terrors of the Law turn into despair, the preaching of the Gospel must be added, that it may be a repentance unto salvation, 2 Cor. 7, 10.” [*The Formula of Concord*. V. The Law and the Gospel. Triglot, pages 953 & 955]

***Therefore true repentance in the wide sense includes contrition and faith— genuine sorrow over sins in that one has offended God, coupled with faith in Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior who has paid for all the sins of all people.*** It is such repentance that we all need to practice, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” (John 3:16-18; 1 John 1:9-10 KJV)

Let us take it to heart that Jesus says: "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light." (Mark 2:17; Matthew 11:28-30 KJV) We all need to be sincerely sorry over our sins against God and His Holy Law; we need to turn from our sin and we need to turn in heart-deep faith to our only Savior from sin, the Lord Jesus Christ, for "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." (Acts 4:12; 16:31 KJV) Realize that TRUE REPENTANCE is required during Lent and during every other day of our life on earth!

Consider the following words from the Holy Bible which emphasize the dire need for ALL people to repent: "There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:1-5 KJV) In the preceding passage the word *repent* is a translation of the Greek root word μετανοεω metanoeo {met-an-o-eh'-o} which means: "*feel remorse, repent*, lit. 'change one's mind' / includes conduct worthy of a heart changed and abhorring sin" [Gingrich Lexicon / Thayer's Greek English Lexicon] Thus, real contrition over one's sin and a heart that rests on God's Son Jesus Christ in sincere living fruitful faith is the type of repentance required if one would avoid perishing in hell, for it is written: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John 3:36 KJV)

Dear readers, let us take the season of Lent seriously by practicing REAL REPENTANCE as we contemplate what it cost our Lord Jesus to redeem us, for "*he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.*" (Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 1:18-21 KJV)

Additionally, let us never forget that the Holy Bible commands: "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." (Matthew 3:8 KJV) Suitable fruits of repentance are evidenced when we have a "faith which worketh by love." (Galatians 5:6 KJV) Take it to heart that Christian love includes being truly forgiving toward others because God has been so abundantly and amazingly forgiving toward us; and, our Lord plainly states: "if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14-15 KJV) God grant that we be genuinely penitent persons who are fruitful in the faith.

May the following hymn verses be the confession and prayer of each and every one of us: "Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me; Died that I might live on high, Lived that I might never die. As the branch is to the vine, I am His, and He is mine. O my Savior, help afford, By Thy Spirit and Thy Word! When my wayward heart would stray, Keep me in the narrow way; Grace in time of need supply, While I live and when I die. Amen." [The Lutheran Hymnal #342, vs. 1 & 5]

m.e.l.