

Epiphany 4
Anabaptism 500 Renewal sermon series #2
2/2/25
Luann Yutzy

Repentance and Repair

James 4:7-10

Resist the devil. Resist the evil one. I'm reminded of in our Anabaptist history where a group got caught up in fighting against evil. I'm thinking of the story of Melchior Hoffman, a leather dresser who had been first Lutheran and then a follower of the Swiss theologian, statesman, Zwingli, before becoming an Anabaptist. Sometime around 1533, in Strasburg, Hoffman believed the day of the Lord was near and rejected the Anabaptist belief of pacifism on the grounds that it became necessary for the children of God to take up arms against the children of Darkness. Many were attracted to his message of the New Jerusalem. Other Anabaptists from other regions joined the fervor. Hoffman became imprisoned pretty quickly.

Someone suggested that the New Jerusalem would not happen in Strasburg but it would be in Munster and so the Visionary Anabaptists went and took over the city of Munster. They got rid of the Catholics in the city. One of the bishops formed their own army and laid siege to New Jerusalem after being expelled.

Inside this city, in the fanatical zeal against the “Children Of Darkness” or evil, there was **a growing insistence that everything must conform to the Bible**. Moderate Protestants were expelled from the city. All the art and items that were connected to traditional belief and worship were destroyed. Outside the city, the bishop and his army killed any Anabaptist that came out to that area. This war went on, and food became scarce. More men than women died in the city in the fight against evil and the leader, John of Leiden, declared that the practice of polygamy could happen because, of course, it's in the Bible.

Some of the people in the city grew tired of the excessive visions and “last-days frenzy” and they opened the gates to the city and let the bishop that had been expelled back in. The king of the New Jerusalem, Leiden was captured, along with two of his lieutenants and they were executed. Hoffman remained in prison back in Strasburg, forgotten and from what I have read, he died in prison. This was the end of the main outburst of revolutionary Anabaptism. This same year, 1536, a Catholic priest, named Menno Simons joined a Dutch Anabaptist fellowship.¹

¹ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day, Vol.2*, (New York, HarperCollins, 1985), 59.

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You heard me mention, Zwingli, Ulrich Zwingli, a Swiss reformer and how a number of Anabaptist leaders had been followers of Zwingli before Anabaptism. Zwingli wanted to restore biblical faith and practice and he differed from Martin Luther in that Martin Luther when it came to scripture was willing to keep all the traditional uses that did not *contradict* the Bible. Zwingli insisted that where there was no specific scriptural support it must be rejected. For example, there are no organs mentioned in the Bible so no organs could be used in the church. Same with the violin. Rapid changes took place in Zurich under Zwingli's direction. Communion was given to the laity. It was considered a symbol now, not a sacrament that in itself gave grace to those who would partake. Monks, priests and nuns were married in this time since it was not specifically taught against in scripture.²

A lot of disputes and differences have been over the Bible. If we look at the Bible as a flat Bible, where all parts are equally relevant for how we live our lives, then we can go and choose anything and pull it out without a thought. All kinds of violence can be backed up by -it's in the Bible, violence to women and murdering our relatives and enemies and even Jesus. Redemptive violence is in the Old Testament. An eye for an eye... you do something to me, I'm going to do something to you. In a flat Bible, we can make a case for having enemies.

That's if we don't think Jesus is God Incarnate or the Word made Flesh. If we believe that Jesus is God we can't look at the Bible as a flat Bible. Jesus is who we follow. We are first and foremost followers of Jesus and no one else. The Bible is not over or authoritative if it contradicts with who Jesus is and how Jesus lived. We are Christocentric, meaning the words of Jesus, the life of Jesus in the Bible has much more weight than the rest of the Bible. We cannot look at the Old Testament and what we see there, how people were treated, how violence was used and legitimize that and be a follower of Christ, the Prince of Peace. We can learn from those stories in the Old Testament. We can learn how not to live.

And this is where I'm going to suggest that repentance as Anabaptists comes in. **Repentance in the form of using the Bible in saying I think you are evil**, "children of darkness" and the Bible says so too. I am right. you are wrong.

Jesus could have rid the world of evil. In the way Jesus taught us to pray the words are, "but deliver us from evil." Repentance in the form of how should I show with my life then of not using the Bible as a way of saying who is evil and who is not.

² Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day, Vol. 2*, (New York, HarperCollins, 1985), 57, 58.

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How do we repent and resist and repair?

We remember. Let us remind ourselves that the church must not be confused with the rest of society. In the New Testament too, there is a marked contrast between the early church and the society around it. Letters were written to these new churches to encourage them to hang in there and encourage each other to stay true to the teachings of Jesus.

This is also in our Anabaptist history. They showed a new way in their insistence on the church as a voluntary community, not born into, but a voluntary decision very different from the civil community around them at that time. They showed in their distinct community a radical egalitarian community where women, in most of the groups had the same rights as men and at least in theory, the poor and the uneducated were as important as the wealthy and the highly educated. This was quite countercultural.³

Living their faith outwardly and being a visible church was an early Anabaptist belief. It was a personal decision of faith that then was shown in a changed life because of the sacrifice of Christ, not because of tradition, not because of being born into Christendom, but I believe in Jesus, God in the flesh who lived and emptied himself, humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death- even death on a cross.

And it is because of that humility of Jesus that we can repent and change.

The devil, if you will, has done a very good job of shaming us all into believing we are scum of the earth as a pastor back home used to say. That kind of guilt and shame will paralyze us into crawling right back to the sin that we had been in- it may even feel comforting to return to the sin and feel bad, of course. The worse we feel makes it feel better. At least I feel bad about it.

We can repent of believing in the Jesus that the world has shown us and start following the Jesus who really is. Think about it when you hear people say they are Christians and they are going to make everything conform to Christianity again. Are we talking about following Jesus or are we using the Bible and whatever happened in the Bible as what we are conforming to?

³Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day, Vol. 2*, (New York, HarperCollins, 1985), 56.

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The words of Jesus, the life of Jesus take priority over everything. It changes everything. It's a new law written on our hearts to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and to love your neighbor as yourself and who is your neighbor? It's the person who didn't meet your standards of what a human being should be. It's the person who wasn't born into the right country or genealogy according to us. They are our neighbor and if they are beside the road and they need help, Jesus says help them. For if you love those who love you what credit is that to you?

It was the despised Samaritan that stopped and helped the person who was robbed and stripped and wounded by the road in the Good Samaritan story. It was the Samaritan who was the Good Neighbor, the one who showed mercy and Jesus said to the expert of the law who was testing him, "Go and do likewise."

If we follow Jesus we are being transformed. The fruit of the Spirit is evident. We are changed people because of Christ and our words and our lives show it.

We don't pray, "Thank God I'm not like them," as Jesus told the parable of some who trusted in themselves and regarded others with contempt. Instead we **remember with the** tax collector, standing far off, who would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner! (Luke 18:9-14)

We remember that we are very capable of being as evil as anyone else. That doesn't mean we are paralyzed and afraid to act. **Repentance can become a posture we carry with us.** Because of Jesus and the sacrifice of love Jesus gave for all people, (I don't know that we will ever understand that kind of love), because of Jesus' example of love and sacrifice and humility, we can come **without shame** and stand in Jesus' presence and repent. "Help me to be more like you, Christ. I'm far from it but I want to become more and more like you."

Grace is given to us. We have not arrived and we never will in this life. That doesn't make us paralyzed. Each one of us stands at the cross, on level ground, not in the distance; we stand at the foot of the cross.

We show by who we are that we are followers of Jesus. We show that we can learn from our failures. Colonialism, indifference, superiority, even from where we came from, racism, arrogance, holding tightly to the way we think things should be done- we make way for teamwork, ideas from the younger

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generations. Humility is different than being passive. Humility has no place in passive aggression. I do it too.

Humility rejoices in each other's gifts. Humility gives for the good of all. Humility does not need to be recognized. Jesus did not have false humility in, "Oh, I don't want to be a bother. I don't want to get in between people. I am afraid of what the person will think of me." He took on *humility for humankind*- that you are my brother and you are my sister and we need each other and I will speak up for you.

We, as Anabaptists, are not the one and only true church. We join with many followers of Jesus in the world and we have much to learn from them. We hold our distinct values which we base on Jesus' life and example as central to how we live our lives and community is important. We need each other, community is open to all and we value living a way of peace in our daily lives and finding other ways of working through conflict without violence.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. (This is referring to wisdom literature where fools delight and laugh in their folly.) Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

"I am the way, the truth and the life," said Jesus.

Jesus our peaceful leader, the servant King.

We can trust him. His words are true. His life and death show it.