

Do you know anybody who either believes to be, or at the very least pretends to be, a big know it all? Maybe that person has read a lot of books, has studied a lot of subjects, or they have a photographic memory, and therefore they are able to provide opinions on a variety of subjects, whether we want them to or not. And because they are smart, and possess a great deal of knowledge, they almost always have to be right all the time! More often than not, it can be difficult to be around these kinds of individuals, because even if they are mistaken, they rarely admit when they are wrong.

If we can't identify anyone who completely falls into that "know it all" category, I would say that there may be times, perhaps, when we have acted this way ourselves. At the very least, whether we want to admit to it or not, we may occasionally think we know what is best for ourselves, or for the other people in our lives. Let's face it; sometimes it doesn't take much for us human beings to be arrogant, self-centered, or egotistical.

I don't think anyone would argue against the idea that many of the religious leaders we encounter in scripture are conceited, big headed, and self-absorbed! We certainly come across these types of attitudes in the Scribes, Pharisees, and chief priests of Jesus day, for they were constantly trying to show everyone around them that they knew everything there was to know about God and God's law! Perhaps this is why Jesus begins his ministry with an **appeal** regarding repentance, along with a special news bulletin that the Kingdom of heaven has come near.

Another way to summarize Jesus short message is that he is telling God's people to let go of their confidence in themselves, they need to let go of their certainty or their belief that they know it all! Instead of being so sure of themselves, instead of putting their trust in the law, or in the religious leaders, they need to learn to trust God through Jesus!!! As his disciples will later learn, after they have followed Jesus for a time, Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life!!!

So, what was the Good News the disciples had followed Jesus to learn about? What message did Jesus teach in the synagogues throughout Galilee as he cured people of sickness and disease? First of all, putting on my Greek hat, the Greek word for Good News (evangelion) used to describe the words of Jesus refer to a victory in war. Imagine a messenger running back from the front lines of a battle shouting, “We’ve won! We’ve won!” That would be good news for the King, the leaders, and anyone waiting to hear news concerning the outcome of a war. Perhaps the ending passage of our narrative from Mathew’s Gospel might be translated, “Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the victory of the Kingdom.

Before calling his first disciples, the Lord declares that The Kingdom of God has come near! In other words, it has entered into the world, as we witness during the baptism of Jesus, when the heavens are torn wide open! The power of sin, and the penalty of death, were about to be defeated by Christ on the cross! His ministry had begun and as he is beginning to build up God’s Kingdom on earth, as he starts to recruit followers to take up his cause, it only makes sense that he would proclaim that they are to repent from their selfish ways, they are to let go of their confidence and certainty, and they are to put their trust in him and on God!

Let’s take a quick step back and briefly talk about the kind of Kingdom Jesus is talking about. First of all, some scholars believe he may be referring to a place, such as an area ruled by a king: like Jerusalem, Judea, or Babylon. Others believe that perhaps Jesus’ understanding of Kingdom is defined by the power or authority that is given to a King to rule the people or subjects under them. A man by the name of Edwards in, “The Gospel according to Matthew,” makes this interesting statement: “In Jesus of Nazareth the kingdom of God makes a personal appearance.” If this is the case then the kingdom Jesus is talking about is not a place, or a power, but a person.

This idea, or concept, can lead us into understanding the Lord's Prayer in a whole new, different, and exciting way! In his small catechism Luther provides the following explanation to the second petition of the Lord's Prayer. "God's Kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us." So...basically when we pray thy Kingdom come, we are praying for Jesus to come to us wherever we are at in life! Perhaps if, and when, we find ourselves struggling to let go of our self-confidence and certainty, we can remember to ask for God's kingdom to make itself known to us, we can pray for Jesus to touch us, and to stir up the Holy Spirit within us, given to us in our baptisms.

It also helps if we continue to remember his words at the beginning of our story from Matthew, and they are words that imply continued or repeated actions. "Keep on repenting!" "Keep on following." To Repent, to follow is not like passing through a doorway that we pass through once, for instance, we don't declare, "I repented and I followed, so now I'm in the kingdom. Rather they are both to be a part of an ongoing lifestyle of the people to whom the rule of God has come near.

You may have heard this said before, but it bears repeating. Repentance properly understood is an "I can't experience, rather than an "I can experience." If we understand repentance as promising God, "I can do better," then we are demonstrating to others that we believe that we are the ones in control. If we think we can do better, or if we think we have the power or knowledge to do it all, then where is there room in our lives for a gracious God, a patient one, who is willing to wait for us to ask for his help? What happens then with our need and our desire for forgiveness?

When we come before God confessing, "I can't do better, then we are dying to self. We are giving up control of our lives. We are throwing our sinful lives on

the mercy of God! We are inviting God to do what we can't do ourselves –namely to raise the dead – to change and recreate us!

The flip side of letting go of our confidence and certainty, of embracing the attitude or slogan of “I can't” is believing in the good news that we discover in the Gospels, “God can!” Later in Matthew's Gospel a centurion leader believes, and his servant is restored to life. A woman who had been bleeding for twelve years has faith that if she can just touch Jesus she will be healed. Her belief leads to her cure! Little ones, little children believe, and Jesus welcomes them with open arms.

I think that the core message of the Gospels, especially in our story from Mathew, and the underlying meaning of Jesus words in today's story, lead us to the understanding that we are called to repent. We are called to turn away from our arrogance, our thoughts of superiority, and our know-it-all-ness and place our trust in Jesus! In fact, this morning I would like to invite you to repeat after me, “we believe, help our unbelief!”

Perhaps the following analogy will shed some light on what I am trying to say. It is one I found in a commentary on Matthew that I would now like to share with you. It is a correlation or illustration which may capture some of the dimensions of what Jesus is trying to teach us in his brief words of preaching before calling the disciples.

“In a crowded airline terminal, hundreds of persons are scurrying in dozens of directions. Above the steady buzz of noise, a voice booms through a loud-speaker, “Flight 362 is now arriving at gate 23. Will passengers holding tickets for New York please check in at gate 23; you will be boarding soon.” Some people, of course, never hear the announcement and continue on their way. Others hear it, but having reservations on another flight, pay no attention. Some, however, who want to go to New York and who have been nervously awaiting such an

announcement, look up expectantly, check their ticket for the flight number, gather their baggage, turn around, and set out with some urgency for gate 23.”

Today Jesus is preaching a message of repentance right before he calls his disciples! Just as John had worked to prepare the people that had come out into the wilderness for the future ministry of Jesus, Jesus prepares his students, his apprentices, and even us for taking over for him after he is gone! And like the disciples who would need to learn let go of their own arrogance, their own self-confidence, their own expectations, and learn to trust in Jesus, we too may need to learn a similar lesson! We too need to learn to follow Jesus in a similar way.

This means more than following him, or chasing him, like in a game of follow the leader! For Jesus does not ask his future students “to follow” him, but rather he says, “Come behind me. Walk behind me. Believe the same things I believe, make my cause, your cause!” He is telling us to make him the most important thing in our lives!

In other words, even one’s own self is to come in second behind Jesus. And this understanding may be supported by how the fishermen react to his command! We are told that Andrew and Peter, “immediately leave their nets, and they followed him.” Their successful occupations take a back seat to Jesus. James and John, “leave their father Zebedee mending nets in a boat and they follow the Lord, they get behind him.” Their family and the relationships they have with their relatives take a back seat to Jesus.

Which begs the question, should a similar challenge be raised about our following Christ? Perhaps we need to remember that coming behind Jesus, following Jesus means work, it means sacrifice, it means putting God’s will and God’s mission in front of everything else in our lives! I pray that all of us will eventually come to this realization, by learning to embrace this idea of discipleship, and that we remember that just as Jesus continually led his own

disciples through change, uncertainty, and transformation, he can do the same thing for us too! We just need to keep in mind that we don't know it all, our way of doing things isn't the only way, and during the times when we come to an understanding or belief that we can't, **God can!** And Thanks be to God for that!
AMEN!