

REPENT? TO WHOM? FOR WHAT?

Recently I came across an apology online that struck me. Please listen to what this woman had to say.

“Yesterday I made a terrible mistake on Twitter -- a big mistake, all of my own doing, out of my own personal head, meaning I own all of it. After the shocking news...my thought processes were firing all over the place. I sent out a tweet that led some to believe that I was accusing a person in the area of sexual attraction, and advancing an agenda. I wasn't doing either of those things. But what I said was speculative, imprudent, and insensitive to an emotionally charged situation. People were rightly appalled, and I have decided to remove the tweet.

I apologize to everyone who follows me, and those who don't but who were also appalled. In the glare of morning, I am myself appalled, and really can offer no excuse beyond thoughtlessness and perhaps a bit of pride. Which always cometh before a fall. And I fell. Mea maxima culpa. To make a mistake of this size tells me that I need to use this Advent season to recalibrate my radar away from my own pride and more toward the sensibilities of others, so that is what I am going to do, starting by removing myself from social media until the Bridegroom has come on Christmas. In your spiritual generosity, please pray for me.”

That apology struck me as heartfelt. This woman did something wrong. She put out a word that was not true simply on the basis of her own understanding of things. She recognized her sin and asked forgiveness from those who read her words. In other words, she repented. Which is what John the Baptist called the Jewish people of his time to do. Repent of their sins. Repent of their wrongdoing. Be sorry for living a lie and disregarding the truth.

John the Baptist called people to repent and so did Jesus after John prepared the way for him. But Jesus does more than call us to repent. Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Jesus empowers us to live in the truth. Without his help we may want to but we will not be able to do so. Think about this. The call to repent only makes sense in a world where there is an understanding that certain things are right and certain things are wrong, certain things are true and others false. That is missing from our world today.

It has become rather common today for many Americans to believe that whatever happens to be the dominant spirit of our age is the truth. Because they think this way it is possible and even necessary to replace the spirit of another age with this new spirit, the spirit of this age—and at the same time call this new spirit—Truth. That is why this era can hold as true things completely opposed to what was believed as true by those who

went before them. And claim to be holding such beliefs precisely because they are true—and “everybody knows it and it is just common sense, obvious.” But if you think about it there is no longer a reference to God’s Truth. It is now simply our truth.

What is God’s Truth? I would say, God’s Truth is the Truth. Truth is God’s understanding of the meaning of any reality, of any thing. To claim that something is true which contradicts what was revealed by Jesus of Nazareth is a distortion and a twisting of the truth for personal benefit. I hear it said at times that if Jesus were walking the face of the earth today he would embrace the ethos of this age. Not so. He did not embrace the morals of his own day why would he embrace what is not true here and now? In such a world what is there to repent of or apologize for? I simply call true what I want to be true—that settles it. There is no need to repent. But Jesus did call for repentance. He left us a sacrament to help us. But if the truth is only that which this age is believes or what makes sense to us or appeals to us. Does that really last?

My friends, the Truth is one. Truth does not change. God does not change the divine mind to make it conform to this particular age or culture. The Truth does not contradict itself. The Truth cannot contradict itself. There is nothing which can be true and not true at the same time. When Jesus says that He is the Way and the Truth and the Life he does not mean that the Truth is somehow changeable. No. God’s meaning of things is the meaning of things. There is a right and a wrong. There is that which is true and that which is false. And we can tell.

There is a Day of Judgment coming; a day when we will all be held accountable. The standard against which we will be judged is God’s standard not the prevailing popular lifestyle of any given age. Only that which is lasting and beneficial and good will last. His winnowing fan is in his hand. We will be winnowed and that which carries some weight to it will be kept and that which is fluff will be blown away.

My friends, Advent is a time for us to take stock of our lives, to identify what is in need of being changed and repented for and then going to the Lord in a spirit of repentance asking forgiveness. That is how we get ready for the great Feast of Lights, Christmas. That is still the voice we hear reaching into the desert of our lives at times beckoning us to return in sorrow and experience the forgiveness Christ has brought. “Long lay the world in sin and error pining til He appeared and the soul found its worth.”

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.