

Repentance Brings Peace
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Date: December 6, 2015

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"Repentance Brings Peace" Pilgrim Church UCC, (Luke 3:1-6) December 6, 2015 (Advent 2)

One of the best Christmas stories ever is Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas

-The Grinch is this mean, green monster who lives in a cave above Whoville. His heart is two sizes too small and he gets really upset when he hears all the annoying Christmas festivities down below.

-He decides to stop Christmas by stealing everyone's presents, trees, and all the food for their Christmas feast. Adding insult to injury, the Grinch dresses up as Santa and forces his dog Max to dress up like a reindeer as they sled down to Whoville to carry out their evil plan.

-The Grinch slides down chimneys and steals everything in sight, including the logs for their fires. A little one, Cindy Lou Who, wakes up to find him in her house! The Grinch lies that he's Santa and was just taking broken items back to his shop to fix them.

-After that close call, Max and the Grinch begin their journey back up Mount Crumpit to dump all the Christmas items into the abyss. Except when the Grinch waits at dawn to hear their cries of despair, he only hears singing. They're still singing their Christmas song and celebrating together!

-The Grinch can't understand this at all, but then realizes that maybe Christmas is about more than just presents and feasting. His heart grows three sizes and he and Max return to Whoville to bring back all the presents and food and trees so that everyone can continue to celebrate Christmas together.

A Story about Repentance

-How the Grinch Stole Christmas has a theme of repentance believe it or not.

-In the Bible, there are two Hebrew and two Greek words that we translate as "repent."

-The two Hebrew words mean to regret or to turn back. Nacham may have been to sigh, an expression of regret. When you do something or say something you regret, don't you sometimes sigh when you realize what you've done?

-In Greek, the two words mean to think again or to change one's intentions. Metanoeo comes from meta—again and noeo—to think. Repenting is thinking again about what you've said or done that caused harm.[1]

-To regret, to turn back, to think again, to change your intentions are normal human experiences.

-John the Baptist speaking about repentance in the wilderness wasn't just some crazy locust-eating weirdo whose message doesn't matter anymore. Repentance is still a vital way of understanding what God intends.

Turning Back to God Today

-Seems almost foolish to think about peace on this Second Sunday of Advent given everything we're seeing in our world. But maybe repentance helps bring about peace.

-Like the Grinch we can't undo the damage that's been done. We can change the present and future by turning back to God if we're not on the right path as individuals or as a society. It's never too late to think again about the kind of world we need and also want for our children. Our thoughts can lead to action.

-In *Speaking Christian*, Marcus Borg writes: "We don't need to do anything to warrant God's love. But repentance—turning and returning to God, going beyond the mind that we have—is the path that leads to transformation."^[2]

-How do we help bring about peace? Maybe it's through repentance—going beyond the mind we have to live as people transformed by God's love. A transformed person can be the hands and feet of God.

-This begins on a small scale. Peace begins within an individual, within a family, with friends and neighbors.

-Peace is possible because God loves us, and it's never too late for our own transformations. It's never too late for our hearts to grow three sizes.

[1] James Rowe Adams, "Repent and Repentance," in *From Literal to Literary: The Essential Reference Book for Biblical Metaphors*, 243-244.

[2] Marcus Borg, *Speaking Christian: Why Christian Words Have Lost their Meaning and Power—And How They Can Be Restored*, 159.