

**Sunday, April 18, 2021, the Third Sunday of Easter (Year B)**  
**Turning**

**Acts 3:12-19**

<sup>12</sup>When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? <sup>13</sup>The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. <sup>14</sup>But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, <sup>15</sup>and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. <sup>16</sup>And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

<sup>17</sup>"And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. <sup>18</sup>In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. <sup>19</sup>Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out"

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Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God**

This Shaker hymn is likely to be familiar to you,

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free  
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.  
When true simplicity is gained,  
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed,  
To turn, turn will be our delight,  
Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.

It's theme echoes through the Pete Seeger folk song

To everything (turn, turn, turn)  
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)  
And a time to every purpose, under heaven

Metanoia is the Greek word we read as repent. Our word has the same roots as penal and penalty, but the Greek means to change your mind. Now Frank Sinatra had some regrets, even if they were too few too mention, but did Jesus intend judgement, guilt, and self-debasement to be the route to salvation? The old Methodist mourners bench was a place you sat if you were under conviction for all the bad things you did. A bit of wailing and chest pounding were expected by the folks in the special pews. After a period of time the mourner became reborn. Then followed years of testimony where a

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person stood before the church to recount the many sins God forgave them. Maybe a tiny bit of vicarious pleasure could be gained from a tale of debauchery well told, but who are we to criticize?

In the Great Awakening that likely passed through here in the 1740's Johnathan Edwards, one of our boys being a thoroughgoing Calvinist, preached about sinners in the hands of an angry God. Picture yourself on the end of a spider's thread above a pool of molten lava with a ferocious bearded man in a white robe holding the other end. It worked a treat in getting people down the sawdust trail to massive regret, life altering decisions, and business as usual a few years later. America is pretty much the land of revivals. It makes me wonder when the first *vival* occurred – was that at Pentecost when they followers spoke in tongues? Do we need to speak in tongues? I was warned by a Primitive Methodist preacher that such things are of the devil. For my money if it makes you behave better then God bless your peculiar faith expressions.

I've been told the Hebrews wandered forty years in the desert wastes because they were being led by a man. If Moses sister, Miriam, had been in charge she would have stopped to ask directions. The journey, however, was a long way around. It was a turning that brought the entire human race to a new direction. They went from many petty deities to one God. That is not just changing your mind but rewiring your brain and inserting a new operating system.

So there are a number of things God uses to get us to turn around. Some recognize the bad they have brought about and regret it. Others feel the path they have taken is not leading to a nice conclusion. Some just find a room in their brains where God has been in residence all along. However you come to Jesus it always involves

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some sort of turning. Going a new direction isn't easy. It means chancing the unfamiliar. Yet there is something about all of us gathered here and watching at home that makes faith a little different. We all came here from somewhere else or from people willing to get up and go somewhere else. I feel the unique expression of faith we bring to the world involves embracing the new, different and challenging. We are revivalists because our mandate is to, dare I say it, "to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no *man* (?) has gone before." We were at it long before Gene Rodenberry launched his Starship Enterprise. Our journey requires a lot of course corrections but it takes us to places we never dreamed we could go. So let Jesus change your mind, your heart, repent and keep on going another way.

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**Closing Prayer:** Lord of life, submitting to death, you conquered the grave. By being lifted on a cross, you draw all peoples to you. By being raised from the dead, you restore to humanity all that we had lost through sin. Throughout these fifty days of Easter we proclaim the marvelous mystery of death and resurrection. For all praise is yours, now and throughout eternity. **Amen.**