

# Repenting for feeling futile (Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:12-23)

## We can't give up on the kingdom of God.

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Repentance is a word we usually associate with Lent, which is still almost a month away. But Jesus starts his ministry with this command. Which makes me wonder: What if repentance is essential to following Jesus?

I will confess (so to speak!) that I have never been a fan of the theology of damnation, such as Jonathan Edwards's threatening sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," first preached in 1741. I have trouble believing that it is God's desire to send us to hell in a handbasket.

I don't think I'm alone in this. In my mainline church life, the word *sin* is almost never said. It's as if we're allergic to it. But if we let sin be defined solely by traditions that focus on sexual morality, we've missed the point. Sin is about breaking God's law—and Jesus is clear about the laws God cares most about.

Jesus calls for a redirection of priorities. When religious leaders are focused on purity laws, Jesus is focused on God's call for compassion—not just for some but for all. When the wealthy are obsessed with attention, Jesus is adamant about making sure that everyone is treated with dignity. When those in power are absorbed by expanding their influence, Jesus is concerned with the well-being of "the least of these": the poor, the hungry, the stranger, the outcast, the imprisoned, the despised.

"Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." What if Jesus doesn't want us to miss the kingdom that could be right here, right now, if we just focused on the things that really matter? What if he's calling us to set down what's getting in our way?

For me—and for many in my circle of friends—the most urgent act of repentance may be this: setting down the feeling of futility. We can't give up on the kingdom of God. Those of us with the privilege of voice or vote can repent of our silence and stand up for the vulnerable. Those of us in mixed political communities can repent of our arrogance and listen to the stranger. Those of us with financial resources can repent of our obsession with the stock market and invest in efforts to reinforce democracy, truth-telling, access to health care, and more.

None of us is exempt from sin. But no one needs to stay captive to it either.