

Whew.... the tension in that song is ummmppphhhh. First, let's all agree Johnny Cash is awesome. Second, that song is pretty terrifying, right? How many of us have heard that description of God??? This God who is coming to cut us down.... By the way for those who don't know me I am Tommy I am one of the volunteers here at Catalyst I work with the teens and help out here and there. My wife thinks its just my excuse to keep acting like a child, but we won't get into that today.

This is the first Sunday in the season of LENT, which is a season of Repentance. Basically what that means to you and me is it's a time to look in the mirror and invite life into our brokenness.

But for many of us repentance doesn't sound like life, it sounds like brokenness, it sounds like a Johnny Cash song. It sounds like Gods gonna cut you down. In fact thats how I thought for a long time . How many of us have heard that description of God. This God waiting for us to mess up and hit us with a lightning bolt. Repent, Repent, Repent.

[Sandwich board repent the end is near]. You see I remember the first time I heard that word. It stuck in my mouth even when I repeated it. "Repentance"... uk. It just never sat right. I remember hearing some preachers on the radio saying if I didn't repent I was going to hell. I remember my teachers in Catholic school telling me I need to go to confession and repent. I remember the priest telling me to say 4 rosaries and repent and sin no more. I remember youth camp telling me I could die on the way home and I should repent and come to the altar.

I remember hearing Jesus quoted repent and sin no more. I know I'm not the only one that gets those flashbacks when I hear the word "repent". For a lot of us, "repent" isn't an invitation. It's a threat! It's "Repent or else"! It's meteors and rocks falling, the end is near, and fear.

What I want to propose to you today is that Repentance is actually "good news"! That's hard for someone like me to swallow, but it's true. So if you're like me, if hearing "Repent" gives you hives, bear with me for a minute.

I have a close friend and we have known each other a long time. I want to show you this morning that repentance is good news because it's not a judgment, it's an invitation. God INVITES us to repent, to leave the ways we're living that are toxic, that bring death into the world. God's invitation to repent is an invitation to join God in rescuing the world. THAT is why "repent" is good news."He would tell me i'm crazy that that statement is irrelevant. He told me the other day the world is fine and we are getting better.

The new advances in technology, the medical sciences, people are more understanding. We don't need God; as science advances we will get better. He said that all the progress and the improvement in social organization will help the human race. These ideas are even tied in now with evolution. I can't say he is the first person that I have heard say this , hey I bet

you've heard the same objection. Maybe even wondered if there is something to it.. I know at some point in my life I have wondered if this was true. So I responded to him I told him I didn't really see that. **Our world didn't reflect that we are getting better(Maybe repeat).**

Do we have more stuff? Yes. Do we have more technology? Yes. Have we learned more about drugs and how to treat our bodies? Maybe. So how would we define the world being better. Let me start with a question do you think the world/America is getting better in these categories in morals, values, ethics, and politics? Of the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace for 268 of them, or just 8 percent of recorded world history. We have killed twice as many people in the last 100 years than in all the recorded history.

That doesn't sound to me like any things getting better. From just the facts it looks like we are the ones destroying each other, our environment, ourselves. Could it be that God is reaching out to save us. I mean sure "we" are fine our "house" might be fine, but what about our cities, towns? What about the world? What about us? What about our souls? Did we find a cure for smallpox? Well yeah, but we haven't found a cure to fix the human condition of hate or racism..

The next thing my friend would say is how can God save us he is too busy killing and punishing?(**Insert Zeus God throwing lightning bolts at humans**) I mean thats all the Old testament talks about right? Well lets look.....

If you have your bible turn with me to Genesis 9 and if you grabbed one of our free bibles from the back the page number is XXX and if you don't have a bible take that one home we want you to have it.

So we are looking into the story of Noah. The flood has taken place and all the craziness has stopped. The world has just been devastated as a result of human sin. God has rescued Noah and his family, and now God is making a covenant with them, which means God's promise is to all of humanity. In this conversation God and Noah go Deep and God makes a covenant or Promise with Noah. Lets take a look.

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the bow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

-- Genesis 9:8-17

This is the first time we see God make a Covenant with us. We will be investigating these more and more during lent and what they mean. A covenant is basically a GUARANTEE. The last verse is God's guarantee, he guarantees to watch over us and all living creatures. He guarantees to sustain life. Specifically he promises the world will never have to fear the destruction by water ever again.

(God with a bow and arrow) We come back to the same thing... So God is just angry and violent he just wants to bring armageddon and kill things. He just sets all these rules then gets angry when I break them. How different is this picture of God? Is this a God looking to just judge and kill us? That's not the picture Genesis gave us. He says he will put his bow in the sky as a reminder. He will put his bow down

I know most of our translations read rainbow, but the Hebrew actually says a bow. "That might sound strange to us, but Ancient Hebrews often imagined God as a fearsome warrior, armed with a bow. That bow could actually shoot lightning bolts of judgment. That picture we have of God is actually how a lot of them imagined God.

"So how crazy would it be to those people to see God LAY HIS BOW DOWN, string down? Surprise!!!!!! God is saying, I'm not at war with you. This bow is a sign of our peace. And I'm never picking it up again." Surprise I am not at war with you!!!!

God tells us he is for life, for living. We continue to break this covenant with God over and over. We continue to kill the earth, each other, and everything we can to not sustain life. God doesn't zap us to dust. He continues to sustain the world and our lives. No wrath, judgment,

destruction against a bunch of covenant breakers, but mercy, love, and Grace. Let's look at Mark 1:9-15 at this point people think God's abandoned them. That maybe they broke the covenant too many times. Maybe that was the last straw and maybe it's too late. We get a glimpse here at the beginning of Jesus ministry and he begins it telling everyone to repent.

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open(have on one slide)

Watch out the heavens are torn open here comes the flaming rocks falling from the sky, here comes the lightning, here comes the apocalypse!!!! If the sky tore open like in the Avengers and in mid day you see stars and oh no God has his bow again and he's bringing wrath and judgment..

and the Spirit descending on him like a dove(wait a dove here comes the fire and brimstone, just kidding heres a pretty bird). And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

-- Mark 1:9-15

Surprise! He did it again .The experience here is crazy it says the heavens were torn open. Remember the avengers the sky is ripped open other peoples stars you're seeing in broad daylight. The heavens tore open "the apocalypse is here oh no" and then what happens a dove flies out. Another reminder that God's not at war with us. Jesus begins his ministry with Gods' kingdom is here and now. That surprise God's not bringing war, but peace. Jesus' message of repent is not a threat, but an invitation for all.

That's a weird his announcement it implies that whatever Kingdom they were following wasn't Gods. That whatever they were doing wasn't good. It wasn't right . He is claling them to change their mind. What you have been doing its not working, return, come back home believe this good news there is life.

Rome had conquered and occupied the Jews at this time. Rome was so good at this they actually had what was called the "Pax Romana" This means the peace of Rome. They sent people out to tell everyone about this and they called it good news.

This so called peace basically meant Surrender to us and give us rights to everything and do things our way. If not then we will kill you and take what we want anyway. Rome thought that their way was the best way. They thought the way they built their kingdom was the only way and if you didn't buy in they killed you. They held their bow in the air and said " Our way or else". Sounds like the same way we view repentance. Sounds like the way we thought about God.

Is that what Jesus said? He calls us to live life, be generous, kind, caring, and to LOVE. There are plenty of other Rome's in the world that promise a peace, they promise protection, they promise life. When have they ever delivered? That's why we need rescue!

Jesus' cry out to us (*insert terminator picture arnold on motorcycle hand reaching out "come with me if you want to live"*) That's God's message to us Repent and believe the good news. The word "Repentance" actually means "*change your mind*", to turn back, return. If we take these translations it changes the way we view the word. There are still so many well meaning christians out there saying repent or you will go to hell! Repent for the end is near! I hear at least one on the radio or Tv every day. The way they lay it out for us is Christians don't do this Christians don't do that. Its no wonder we struggle with this idea of Repentance. i want to help with this so I want to tell you a story.

There was a man named Mike and he was a hard working, football loving, regular guy.. He didn't have the ability to go to college because he was the oldest of 11 and he had to work the family business to make sure his brothers and sister had all the opportunities they needed to play sports go to expensive private school and most important have food on the table.

Mike grew up in church and knew all about God. He followed the rules for the most part as best as anyone could. He attended church on Sunday, took part in communion, and had good moral standing. He raised his four kids with the best of his ability to be moral and good kids. He moved on from working the family business to starting businesses of his own, and eventually landing a job for Schepps.

He within a year worked his way from salesman to running the entire district. He had reached all the success “Pax Americana” could offer. Had a huge house, new cars every year, expense account, bonuses, the newest biggest tv (because that truly screams you have arrived).

He had it all! He would tell you though every day he felt more empty than before, every day he felt more detached from happiness, his wife, and his kids. He would tell you his life was dead. As he started to search for the meaning of life, like we all do at some point or another he realized he was dead too. Not just his stagnant surroundings.

Broken and alone as he was traveling for work one day which was the custom 5 days a week. He pulled to the side of the road and he asked God all the questions we all want to ask. Why is my life falling apart? Why am I not happy? Where are you God? Is this the best life has to offer? That moment he promised God to follow his good news no matter where it took him. It transformed his life! I mean he began to live.

Everyone at work thought he couldn't get any better, but he did. His family didn't understand his new found happiness, this joy that emanated from him. It wasn't that annoying happiness that gives off that creepy vibe and you run when you see that person coming, but just this I want to be around that guy. He began to explain to his family how he had it all wrong and apologized for leading them in the wrong direction. He began truly living a life of repentance which is good news. He impacted his family so much it changed the way they all lived.

It doesn't mean it was happily ever after and they never struggled or didn't have to work through real life events. Money, Sickness, kids growing up, moving, you name it they experienced it, but this repentance that he lead changed everything. They had fun and enjoyed life there house was the go to party house that everybody wanted to go to.

Everyone wanted to be around them and find out what the secret was and he told them repentance. You see that repentance that he found was good news. Why? Because it was an invitation to life, it was his rescue, it brought life into his world in the midst of so much death. I would say thats good news!

I know what you're thinking i'm fine everything's okay. He is talking to the person next to me or them they need the good news. I'm talking to everyone including myself. You see the good news never stopped being good news, but sometimes we stop believing it. Sometimes it gets

hard to live it. Sometimes the good news is hard work. Sometimes we think our news is better.

What I want to propose to you is that the good news isn't easy, but it is life. I get to tell you that because I have seen it happen in front of my eyes. Mike is my dad and I am the youngest of his four boys. It changed my life, I watched it change my wife's life when she was 15 years old and countless others. I've seen the good news change people and move them and bring happiness where there was nothing, but questions, emptiness, and insecurities.

Lent is all about repentance. Reminding us that God is not at war he put his bow down, he ripped the heavens open and sent a dove. He came down in person to tell us how we could have life. He calls us to repentance not as a threat, but as an invitation. That doesn't sound to me like the end is near with doom and gloom.

To say yes to God is to join him. To participate in what God is doing. To bring that same life to others that we have received. With this I get to participate and bring that same life as I return. So as we look at that picture of God (**God with a bow**) that so many people have. The God with the bow that shoots lightning arrows, the God that hails down fire and rocks or the God that brings the apocalypse. Let me invite you to change your mind. Can I invite you to choose God's rescue, to choose Life amidst so much death. To choose the God who is calling out peace with me.

Communion SetUp

[**Communion Slide**] During Lent, we'll end each of our gatherings with Communion. This meal points back to the meal Jesus shared with his followers the night before he was killed. This meal is proof that God has put down his bow, that he isn't at war with us. When we introduced death into the world, God *took* that death for us. God died in our place.

At that meal, Jesus broke a loaf of bread, passed it to his followers and told them it was his body, broken for them. His body, broken for their sin. So we take wafers to represent our brokenness, that God died for us.

Later in the meal, he passed around a cup of wine. He told them it was his blood, poured out as a new covenant between God and humanity. So we dip our wafers in grape juice to represent the new life we have in God through Jesus.

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive Communion. If you want to be at peace with God, if you want to change your mind and say yes to God's life, you're welcome to come to Jesus' table.

As you came in today, you received a lava rock. As I pray for us, hold this rock as a reminder that God is not tearing open the skies to rain down fire and brimstone on us. Surprise! He is at peace with us and bringing Life.

After I pray for us, as you are ready, come forward to receive this meal that is God's peace with you.

Benediction

Catalyst as you go this week and carry this rock may we be a community of people that lives life and brings that Good news to those around us. Go in his grace and peace and we will see you next week.