



# Pastor Ken's Sermon

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**MATTHEW 4:12-25, I CORINTHIANS 1:10-18, ISAIAH 9:1-4**  
**JANUARY 22, 2023**

## **“DEDICATED ... UNITED ... EXPECTANT”**

It doesn't take very long if you're on your computer to see a feed pop up that contains the words *“warning signs.”* It's not usually something about your computer, although if you have some anti-virus software on it, and these days why wouldn't you – those come up frequently too. What I'm talking about are those ads from various sources that say, *“6 warning signs of \_\_\_\_\_”*. What follows could be a health issue - most of them are, but they're also frequently economic, particularly the stock markets, environmental, we get a lot of those these days, even relationship oriented...six signs that *“she's just not that into you”*.

It's tempting to click these pop-ups, if not for curiosity's sake, then to be doubly sure your recent lack of energy, the slight downturn in your portfolio or the fact your texts are not being immediately returned is not in fact *“a warning sign.”* You probably know these things usually lead to some company or organization website where *“for a payment or donation of just”* ...you can do something about this.

Sometimes however, warning signs are quite necessary to heed – and consequential if you don't. I think only of the tragic situations in Buffalo, New York this past December or in California recently, where first responders came upon people who either had not heard, or not heeded warning signs to stay indoors and off roads because of dangerous weather conditions.

In our lesson today from Matthew, our Lord says, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* If that's not a warning, I don't know what one is. But what is Jesus warning his listeners about? The questions that can be asked are good ones, *“What does it mean to repent?”*, and just how close is this *“kingdom of heaven”* to us, to me? If it were a storm in other words, how much time do I have to prepare till it arrives – and how severe will it be? Jesus our Lord begins his ministry with a stirring announcement and warning that something extraordinary is near, and if you don't pay heed to that something, you may miss it.

Our other lessons today also contain warnings of sorts. The prophet Isaiah says, *“there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish”* and *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”* You may think of these as promises but they do warn at least darkness and anguish whatever their origins, that their days are numbered. In I Corinthians, Paul warns, through heartfelt appeal, that substituting anything for Christ in the church will be fatal to that church.

What does or did our Lord Jesus mean when he said *“repent.”* Martin Luther famously said, *“When our Lord Jesus said “repent”, he willed that the entire life of the believer should be one of repentance.”* Repentance though is surely more than feeling bad about ourselves – as Jesus issued a summons to it, he surely surveyed not only the hearts of his audience, but the terrain around him, the religious practices and impulses of his people Israel and said *“Stop...you are on the wrong track, you are substituting things of your own making for devotion to God – and if you don't turn around you will miss God.”* – expressed in Matthew as *‘the kingdom of heaven’*.

What then do these lessons from Matthew, I Corinthians and Isaiah call us to, and warn us we must do so that we don't miss the kingdom. Last week, when I shared with you my decision to retire this summer, I spoke a little bit about what I plan to do next. My future is by no means in clear focus, but some ideas and opportunities I believe the Lord has placed on my heart are out there. Today I ask you to do the same sort of thinking with respect to this congregation. I surely want to be an aid to that process, though for obvious reasons I can't lead it. Discerning "what's next" for Calvary belongs to you.

From our lessons today I wish to put forth some guidance – maybe "wisdom" is a better word. First, we must always, as they say, *'Keep the main thing the main thing'*. Jesus is the main thing. Jesus "is" the kingdom of heaven, Jesus "is" the rule and reign of God in and through the church. In using the word "repent" our Lord is doing much more than calling us to feel bad for our sins – he is calling his church to do things His way.

So Calvary, be dedicated to that call. Richard Lints, a professor at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, in a recent edition of "Christianity Today" magazine wrote; *"While not supposing the church is ever free from sin, its mission is to be a witness to the dignity of every human life, to the inevitable brokenness of every human life, and to the surprising mercy of God reflected in the reconciling work of the church among people who at enmity with each other."* Citing the parable of the Good Samaritan, Professor Lints says the church must be careful not to put ourselves in the place of the Samaritan, tempting as that may be for some preachers to urge, but to realize and celebrate that God comes to us as the Samaritan came to the stranger. We're the bleeding stranger, whom God in mercy comes to continually. When Jesus said "repent and follow me" he means come and do things the way I did.

Be united. The church to which Paul wrote in Corinth practically patented ways to be at enmity with one another. Philippians 2:4 however says, *"let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others."* In discerning your future, remember that a 'divided Christ', as Paul sarcastically referred to our Lord as in our lesson, is no Christ. You are the body of Christ. Express your interests about this congregation in the forthcoming call process but listen intently to the interests of others too. And don't let your theology whisk away your tenderness toward others. Jesus never did.

And live expectantly. Isaiah promises that upon you *"a light will shine"*. Call processes are not easy, but they're not burdensome either. Participate in ours – I referred in my Annual Report summary to one way you can. Offer yourselves to the church as a call committee member – you are never too old, and you are most assuredly not too young or too new around here to be a vital part of what lies ahead in this congregation. And besides, if Isaiah is correct, the Lord we look to and serve is especially good at lifting burdens and bringing joy. To you He will do both. AMEN