

Weekly Bible Study
group – January 14, 2009

This week's reading assignment: Matthew 3-4

Last week we learned that the name "Jesus" is identical to the Hebrew name "Joshua." So when the angel told Mary and Joseph that their child was to be named "Joshua," they would have immediately realized that this was a famous name: more than a thousand years earlier, a man named Joshua was God's chosen leader to take the wandering people out of the desert and lead them into the Promised Land. By giving him the same name, the implication is that this new child, this "Jesus/Joshua" will have a similar role in God's story.

In Matthew 3-4, we are first introduced to the adult Jesus. His mission and his ministry is about to begin. And the way it begins tells us a lot about who he is and what he's come to do. The very first words that Jesus preaches are: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Mat. 4:17). In his own words, this is what Jesus came to proclaim in his teaching and in his life.

The word "repent" has a number of connotations in the English language. To really get at the meaning of what Jesus is saying, it is helpful to look at the original Greek. The word that is translated as "repent" in our Bibles is the word *metanoia*. This word literally means "a change of mind, a reorientation, a fundamental transformation of outlook." When Jesus comes on the scene and preaches *metanoia*, he is saying "turn around – you've been looking in the wrong direction."

But if we're supposed to be "turning around," what is it that we're turning away from, and what are we turning toward? Jesus tells us that this is all about a *kingdom*. A government. A new world order. He essentially says "Turn around! Leave the world as you know it! A new government has arrived, a new way of living where God is on the throne."

The thesis statement of Jesus' ministry is "turn around, because God's new world is very near." It is an invitation to live according to a new set of rules and a new set of dreams. It is an invitation to love completely, to take the road of weakness and humility, trusting that God will keep his word to us in the end. As Jesus says in chapter six, "Do not be worried about anything...seek first God's kingdom."

It is also in these chapters that we read about baptism. The practice of being dipped into the water and coming out as a new person. This is a symbol of our decision to leave behind the kingdom of this world, giving our lives entirely to the coming kingdom of God that Jesus announced. Every time we humble ourselves in confession and repentance (as we will tonight), we re-affirm this decision to seek first God's kingdom.

Questions:

- 1) What do you need to confess to God this week, what should you turn away from? In what way is this thing holding you back from fully embracing God's coming kingdom? (P.S. – that's the whole point!)
- 2) In these chapters, the words and actions of Jesus give us clues about what God's new kingdom is like, and how it is different from the current kingdom of the world. What do you see here?