

“Repent, says the Lord; the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”***Matthew 4:7***

On a cold morning in November, Leigh Ann Tuohy and her husband, Sean, were driving when they spotted a young man walking alone along the side of the road in only shorts and a cotton T-shirt. As they drove past, Leigh Ann said two words to Sean that would change their lives forever. She told him to “turn around,” and he did. The two invited the young man into their warm vehicle and eventually their home and family. The young man was Michael Oher, who with the love and support of the Tuohy family, went on to become a first-round NFL draft pick and Superbowl champion with the Baltimore Ravens.

Turn around ...

two simple words that changed the course of several lives in one moment.

Turn around ...

two simple words that call us to retrace our steps and see what we may not have seen before.

Turn around ...

a call to change and conversion.

Lent’s call to repentance is a call to turn around. When we repent, much like running into our home for forgotten keys or turning around on the interstate due to mixed up directions, we seek something we’ve forgotten and reorient ourselves to get back on track.

The Greek work for repent is “metanoia.” It means “to think differently after,” and indicates a change of mind, heart or consciousness. Repentance requires the willingness and humility to recognize we have lost our way and to change. All of us have something for which we need to repent: a person we have wronged, a good we have neglected to do, a cruel or unkind word we have spoken. We have been less than lovely, less than faithful and less than gracious from time to time with others and with ourselves. And the call gently comes into the muddled space of discord, with a voice that tells us to simply turn around.

Step back into your colleagues’ office and clear up a misunderstanding. Sign up to volunteer. Recommit to your practice of prayer and meditation. Prioritize date night with your partner, family time with your children, weekly calls or visits to your aging parents. Set down old ways of being and doing that aren’t serving you, and simply turn around. Follow more faithfully the path of goodness and love, service and truth. Listen to the still, small voice in your heart and simply, without shame, turn around.

There is a promise in God's call to conversion. Repent; turn around! For the reign of God is at hand. The reign of God is a time of fulfillment and flourishing, when there is no distinction between heaven and earth. Jesus promised us it is closer than we think; indeed, it is just around the corner. Our repentance and reconnection to God and others brings it about. For as theologian Walter Rauschenbusch reminds us, "The Kingdom of God is not a matter of getting individuals into heaven, but of transforming the life on earth into the harmony of heaven."

What needs to be turned around in your life? What do you need to seek again?

