I’m not sure how I got on their mailing list, but in the last few months I’ve been receiving emails from an organization called “Change.com”. I think I signed a petition educating the abolition of capital punishment. “Change.com” appears to be a clearinghouse for folks seeking social change. There’ll be every possible opinion on particulars of the causes covered by this organization. But what strikes me is the focus on change.

After all, what does Jesus require of us? He asks for repentance and faith. Repentance, very simply put, is change, is an about-face, a complete turnaround. To encounter Jesus is to come face-to-face with the need change ourselves and our world. Repentance is not simply sorrow regret, it is a transformation, not only interiorly, but in our deeds, in how we see and act in the world.

In the passage assigned for today’s Gospel reading, it portrays this in action. To encounter Jesus Is to be changed. Those first disciples: Andrew, Peter, James and John meet Jesus and their lives are transformed. They cannot be the same after knowing him. To know Jesus is to reorient our lives.

Now we’ll typically read this message and take it in a very personal, individual way, an almost “Jesus and me” way. But I would suggest the challenge is not only to our individual and personal lives but to the social order as well. We are to repent– change –not only personal habits or behavior that falls short of God’s ideal for us. We need to look at the larger picture of our society in the social order. The Gospel and its demands is not simply about individuals but about the way we all live in the world.

It has been said that racism is America’s original sin. Repentance requires that as a nation we dismantle any structures that smack of racism. There are plenty examples of social wrongs that require action. Racism is one. Our attitudes and behavior towards immigrants and refugees is another. The neglect of Native Americans and their needs confront us with yet another arena for conversion. The radical gap between extreme wealth and extreme poverty must be in our awareness. The list can go on and on.

The encounter with Jesus intense demand for repentance has very practical social implications
for all of us. To know him is to love him and to love him is to make ourselves vulnerable to change in our personal and in our corporate lives.

“This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel.”

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