

My first experience at a “real” university was back in the late 1980s at Purdue University.

Compared to going to school in Flint, Purdue was “enormous”.

One of the things I remember well was the activity on what were called the “quads.” A quad is a lawn surrounded on at least three sides by various school buildings.

On the quad back then were various things like fund raisers – bash an old car with a sledge hammer for a dollar a swing ... protests – students speaking out against policies in South Africa ... and the street preachers.

While I can’t remember the man’s name, I do remember him and his story.

In the heat of the summer sun, an elderly man would be crying out on the lawn, “Repent! Repent! You are all going to Hell! Repent!”

There was always a crowd, and he would take on all comers ... so there was always an argument. Eventually, it would be time for classes and the old guy would pack up his things, and the hecklers would walk off to their studies.

I was not very interested in this whole ordeal, but one day I watched as he was verbally assaulted by a group of radical students. I felt sorry for him; and when he was packing up, I came by and helped him get his things and asked him to help me understand his message.

From the story he told me, he had been a somewhat run-of-the mill person belonging to a Protestant denomination. His wife had passed away, and in he began reading Scripture on his own. He had reached a conclusion, which currently escapes me, and saw it as something that was immensely life-changing.

He spoke about it with his children and relatives, but they didn’t understand or agree with him. So, he took it to his pastor, who was not very impressed. Indignant, he took it to another Protestant denomination. No luck. Then another. He even, he told me, took it to the Papist church (that is the Catholics) ... and the priest, too, was blinded to this new insight.

Filled with anger and indignation, he took his message to the streets. And what I saw was the end result ... shouting on a college campus. The poor gentleman had become a parody ... a caricature of a prophet. And he had lost everything for this.

And listening to Saint Paul in the Letter to the Corinthians, one might get this idea. Because Saint Paul tells us some very radical things, ending with “For the world in its present form is passing away.”

The prophet Jonah is called by God to go to Ninevah. I love the story of Jonah – especially the “Veggie Tales” rendition of it. I own that on DVD. Jonah is given a message from God ... not for the Israelites – that is, not for his own people – but for the people of Nineveh – a group of pagans.

And Jonah doesn't care about these pagans ... and he especially doesn't want to go. After all, every good Israelite knows that pagans are all going to spend eternity in the fires of Gehenna.

And so, Jonah tries to run away ... he gets on a ship, which is hit by a storm, and is tossed overboard ... and he is eaten by a fish. Three days later, he is spit up on the shore and finds himself closer to Nineveh.

Reluctantly he takes the message to these pagans, and before he can get even one-third of the way through the city ... what happens?

THEY REPENT!

No fire. No brimstone. No Gehenna. No Hell.

These pagans turn to God and repent from their evil ways!

And in the Gospel, Jesus calls us to repent as well. But Jesus doesn't tell us we're going to Hell; He calls us to REPENT AND BELIEVE.

The Greek word for repentance is "meta – noia" which means to "change your mind."

That sure sounds a lot different than repent, doesn't it? Change your mind. Change your heart.

Stripped of all it's negative connotations, doesn't sound all that bad, does it?

Change your mind. Change your heart.

And what should we change our minds about?

Again, in the Gospel, Jesus calls to Simon and Andrew ... "come follow me, I will make you fishers of men." And shortly after that, he calls to James and John. And what do they do? Immediately they left everything and followed Jesus.

And so, where does this leave us?

Jesus calls us, too, to "change our minds" and to "follow him."

Where in our thoughts are we hung-up on our own interpretations of things? Where are our hearts "stuck" in patterns not in-line with the Gospel? Where are we all alone with our own ideas – nobody will listen to us ... but even more so, we've stopped listening to what Jesus has called us to do. What do we have to give up to take Christ and His Gospel more seriously?

So let us pray to open our hearts and our minds to a serious spirit of repentance – a spirit that will change our minds and our hearts. And let us whole-heartedly follow the whole Gospel ... to follow Jesus, completely ... Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life.