

As Christians we know that believing in God, having faith in God is the most important thing in our lives. We know that God is at the heart of everything. We know that it is only in God that we will experience real joy and real peace. Nothing else in the whole world can hit the spot in the same way as our faith in God can.

But this orientation towards God will often put us at odds with the world around us. 'Go away', said Amaziah the priest of Bethel to the prophet Amos, '*get back to the land of Judah, do your prophesying there. We want no more prophesying in Bethel*'. Most people are only interested in this life, in this world, and don't want to be pestered by God-botherers like us. They don't want to be reminded that there might be something else to life beyond money and immediate pleasures.

And Jesus certainly doesn't gloss over the difficulties of following him. 'Take nothing for the journey' – no baggage, no possessions, not even a spare tunic. Don't expect a real home of your own. Just stay wherever someone might happen to put you up. And if some people don't make you welcome, just shake the dust off your feet and move on.

But of course however strong our faith might be, we are all of us infected by the disease of this world. We are all tempted to live our lives as if God didn't exist. It's so much easier just to go along with the prevailing atmosphere. Jesus tells us that the message we are to preach is repentance. But first of all, of course, we must preach it to ourselves, and probably cast out a few devils as well.

And it's not just a matter of saying sorry for a few sins. It's about the complete reorientation of our lives. It's about the healing of our personalities. It's about total trust, rediscovering that even *before the world was made* each of us was called and chosen, called and chosen to be an adopted son of God.

Repentance is not a one-off. Nor is it something we need to do now and then. Repentance is a way of life, an opening up of our hearts to God. Constant repentance is the chief quality required of a missionary. And in the world as it is today none of us can afford not to be a missionary.

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