

Devotional—day 12

"Turn Back, O Man"

EPISCOPAL HYMN #536

Turn back, O man, forswear thy foolish ways.
Old now is earth, and none may count her days,
Yet thou, her child, whose head is crowned with flame,
Still wilt not hear thine inner God proclaim,
"Turn back, O man, forswear thy foolish ways."

Earth might be fair, and all men glad and wise.
Age after age their tragic empires rise,
Built while they dream, and in that dreaming weep:
Would man but wake from out his haunted sleep,
Earth might be fair, and all men glad and wise.

Earth shall be fair, and all her people one:
Not till that hour shall God's whole will be done.
Now, even now, once more from earth to sky
Peals forth in joy man's old, undaunted cry,
"Earth shall be fair, and all her folk be one!"

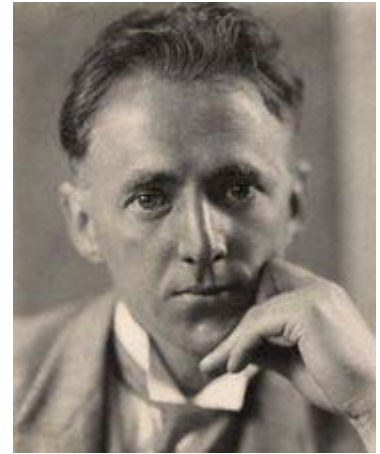
~ Clifford Bax, 1919

1 Samuel 13:13-14 (NIV)

13 "You acted foolishly," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. **14** But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command."

CLIFFORD BAX (1886-1962)

Bax was born on July 13, 1886 in Knightsbridge, London. He was educated at the Slade and the Heatherly Art Schools, finishing his education in Germany. Bax was a versatile writer, known particularly as a playwright, a journalist, critic and editor, and a poet, lyricist and hymn writer. He also was a translator. The composer Arnold Bax was his brother, and set some of his words to music.



Independent wealth gave Bax time to write and social connections. He founded the Phoenix Society (1919-1926) to revive important Elizabethan and Restoration dramas. His first play to be staged was *The Poetasters of Ispahan* in 1912 and his plays continued to be staged regularly until 1946. Bax died on 18 November 1962.

Hosea 12:5-6 (The Message)

5 God is God-of-the-Angel-Armies, God-Revealed, God-Known. **6** What are you waiting for? **Return to your God!** Commit yourself in love, in justice! Wait for your God, and don't give up on him - ever!

Joel 2:11-15 (The Message)

11 God himself bellows in thunder as he commands his forces. Look at the size of that army! And the strength of those who obey him! God's Judgment Day - great and terrible. Who can possibly survive this? Change Your Life!

12 But there's also this, it's not too late - God's personal Message! - "**Come back to me** and really mean it! Come fasting and weeping, sorry for your sins!" **13** Change your life, not just your clothes. Come back to God, your God. And here's why: God is kind and merciful. He takes a deep breath, puts up with a lot, This most patient God, extravagant in love, always ready to cancel catastrophe. **14** Who knows? Maybe he'll do it now, maybe he'll turn around and show pity. Maybe, when all's said and done, there'll be blessings full and robust for your God! **15** Blow the ram's horn trumpet in Zion! Declare a day of repentance, a holy fast day.

Luke 13:1-9 (The Message)

1 About that time some people came up and told him about the Galileans Pilate had killed while they were at worship, mixing their blood with the blood of the sacrifices on the altar. **2** Jesus responded, "**Do you think those murdered Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans?** **3** Not at all. **Unless you turn to God, you too will die.** **4** And those eighteen in Jerusalem the other day, the ones crushed and killed when the Tower of Siloam collapsed and fell on them, do you think they were worse citizens than all other Jerusalemites? **5** Not at all. **Unless you turn to God, you too will die.**"

6 Then he told them a story: "**A man had an apple tree planted in his front yard. He came to it expecting to find apples, but there weren't any.** **7** He said to his gardener, 'What's going on here? For three years now I've come to this tree expecting apples and not one apple have I found. Chop it down! Why waste good ground with it any longer?' **8** "The gardener said, 'Let's give it another year. I'll dig around it and fertilize, **9** and maybe it will produce next year; if it doesn't, then chop it down.'"

Twists and Turns By Diane Komp

On Easter Sunday in 1970, John Michael Tebelak went to church. He left depressed and later said he felt the dry liturgy did more to keep the stone rolled in front of the tomb than celebrate Jesus' resurrection. During those days of flower power and free love, many young people Tebelak's age turned away from traditional religion. Instead of turning away from the Gospel, he turned it into a rock musical.

When I saw *Godspell* in the early seventies, I wasn't a Christian, but Tebelak's efforts to breathe life into the Gospel touched my heart. Some of the songs were poignant. Some told their lessons with humor. One of my favorite pieces was a vamp-type spoof, "Turn Back, O Man, Forswear Thy Foolish Ways." The song didn't make fun of repentance. It showed how silly our evil ways can be.

"Turn" is one of the strongest verbs in the Bible. The biblical version of turning is a two-way action—for God and us. God has choices and so do we. "You turn us back to dust, and say, 'Turn back, you mortals'" (Ps. 90:3). Our physical safety and emotional health depend on God's turning in our direction. "Turn to me, and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted" (Ps. 25:16). Our safety and health depend on our turning from sin. "Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways." (Ps. 119:37) Furthermore, when we turn toward God and sense his turning toward us, we turn toward our fellow beings. The prophet Malachi foretold signs of the Gospel: parents and children would turn their hearts towards each other (Mal. 4:6).

In the impoverished country of Sierra Leone, children are as valued as they were in the days of Jesus. During the civil war, thousands of little boys were kidnapped and turned into child soldiers. Under the influence of drugs, they carried out the bidding of their rebel commanders, killing, raping, and maiming. At the end of the war, it was hard to repatriate them to their villages. Most of their parents were dead. The rest of the villagers feared them. To help these boys, an innovative priest used a Gospel story of the turning heart. In village dramas, he had the boys act out the parable of the prodigal son. At the climax of this West African *Godspell*, the boy would use the prodigal's words to turn the heart of the village fathers. "Father," these boys begged, "I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." And the village patriarch would respond, "This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" (Luke 15:11-24).

Which direction is your heart pointing? Towards whom does it need to turn to do the will of God? At the end of the parable, Jesus tells us the outcome of turning in the right direction: "They began to celebrate."

Time for personal reflection (Day 12):

Looking back through time, is there a time in my life when I refused to turn to God and therefore set my “kingdom” up to “not endure” like Saul’s?

Which direction is my heart pointing? Do I need to make a u-turn?

Do I “turn” to-and-from so often that I find myself just traveling in a circle? What do I need to do to stay on a straight path to God?

In “Twists and Turns,” Diane Komp states that “Jesus tells us the outcome of turning in the right direction: ‘They began to celebrate.’” As we’ve already discussed, *Godspell* was created as a joyous celebration of the hope that the Gospel of Matthew provides us. After almost 2 weeks of hard work and long rehearsals, am I still focused on the joy and celebration of the show? Am I allowing outside influences to hide my light or even blow out my candle?

How many times has God given me a “second-chance,” like the prodigal’s son or the gardener with the apple tree? Do I need to “declare a day of repentance?”