

## “Tune In, Turn On, Drop Out” (Mark 1:14-15)

Lent 1, March 1, 2009

*“Tune in, turn on, drop out.”* If you were around in the 60’s – or even if you weren’t – this slogan conjures up a lot of images. Hippies and Haight Ashbury; Flower Power and the Summer of Love; and, of course, Timothy Leary, the guy who came up with the slogan. Looking back, it all seems kind of naïve, doesn’t it? Even kind of silly. But there was also a darker side to it – an irresponsible, self-destructive side. Sadly, many who tried to *“tune in, turn on, and drop out”* paid a terrible price. They were seeking freedom but came out so damaged that some rightly call Leary and his followers the “wasted generation” – in both senses of the word. That, too, is the legacy of *“tune in, turn on, drop out.”*

So this being the case, why would I choose such a slogan as my sermon theme? I do have a good reason. I think the slogan can be redeemed. For you know, there’s nothing wrong with the slogan *per se*, just with the application. What matters is who you tune in *to*, what you turn on *to*, and what you drop out *of*. In fact, rightly applied, you can even make the slogan serve Jesus’ message in our text: **“Repent, and believe in the good news.”** Yes, rightly applied, that is precisely Jesus’ call at the beginning of Lent: *“tune in, turn on, and drop out.”*

First He calls us to ***tune in*** – tune in ***to God***. That’s what it means to **“repent.”** Yes, Bible scholars, I know the Hebrew word for **“repent”** – *shuv* – means to *“turn around”* and the Greek word – *metanoiete* – means to *“change your mind,”* but repentance is different for someone who is already a Christian. It involves a subtle combination of the two, which is *tuning in (or tuning in better) to God*.

Just to illustrate what I mean, let me tell you what happened to me last Tuesday. Most mornings my radio alarm wakes me up with nice, soft classical music. Tuesday morning that was not the case. Billaaah! I practically fell out of bed, thinking, “What is that ungodly racket?!” It sounded like the Battle of Armageddon being fought in my own bedroom! I turned off the radio as fast as I could, and when I finally...came to, I turned on the light and checked the radio dial. Guess what? It was just a little bit off. Somehow, I must have tweaked it. Just a *little*, but man, what a difference that made!

Well you know, in our spiritual lives, too, it’s easy to get just “a little bit off” – become not fully “tuned in” to God. Not that we mean for that to happen. We never do it intentionally – anymore than I intentionally tweaked the radio dial, whenever, however, I did it. Still, it happens, and most often it happens gradually. The demands of everyday life pull ever so gently at our attention. The values of the secular world tug oh-so subtly at our hearts. Almost imperceptibly, a little pressure from here, a little nudging from there, move us just a little bit away from God. Not totally, mind you. Not even a lot. Outwardly, we may still pray and worship, read our Bible, believe the Gospel, and value God’s rules, but inwardly...the connection with God gets a little fuzzy, then a little fuzzier – just a little bit off. Just a *little*, but what a difference that can make in our spiritual lives!

The truth is, our spiritual lives are most vulnerable when we're just a little bit off. When we're a lot off, we usually know it. We usually feel guilty about it. There's at least awareness something's wrong that ought to change. And when we're not "off," when we're really tuned in, we know that, too. We are humbled by it. And grateful. But just a little bit off? That's fertile ground for temptation.

Here's why. With the possible exception of someone like Hitler, no one gives into temptation thinking their sin is really a "sin" in the true sense. I mean, no one thinks to themselves: *This is a vile, disgusting, selfish act that will hurt other people, damage my character, and utterly offend God...but I'm going to do it anyway!* No, what makes a temptation "tempting" is that it looks appealing, looks like something good, so good that we want to do it anyway, even though it's a sin, which means we need to come up with reasons for doing it anyway, reasons why it's not a sin – or at least not enough of a sin to worry about. This, of course, leads to rationalization, and we all know how it can purr in our ear: *Everybody else does this. And times are different now. And my situation is unique. And no one will ever find out. And I'll just do it this once.* On and on it can go until we convince ourselves: what God calls "wrong" is not that wrong, practically okay, certainly harmless, so we might as well go ahead and do it. Rationalization!

But now, think about it. How likely are we to rationalize that way when we're really "tuned in" to God? I won't say it's impossible, but it's a lot less likely when we're really focused on Him, vividly aware of His presence, deeply grateful for His love and blessings. No, when we're really "tuned-in" we'll see these rationalizations for what they are and nip them in the bud. But when our connection with God is fuzzy, that's a different story, isn't it? We are much more vulnerable when we're just a little bit off. So if we notice ourselves toying with temptations instead of nipping them; if we find ourselves thinking "such and such wouldn't really be so bad even though technically it's wrong," that's a sure sign that we need to do the spiritual equivalent of checking our dial and tuning in better to God. In short, we need to "**repent.**"

Now, let's be clear what this means. Many people think repentance is taking stock of our lives, identifying what doesn't please God, then weeding the bad stuff out. To be precise, though, that's the response to repentance, not repentance itself – and we'll get to that in just a minute. In the Bible, repentance itself is turning toward God, changing our mind toward God, making sure the connection is solid, then making whatever changes are needed. Repentance itself is "tuning in" better. It begins with delving into our hearts and asking honestly: Am I vitally connected with God? Am I really focused on Him, fully trusting in Him, completely committed to Him, deeply grateful for His blessings? Am I? Then, depending on the answers, the next step is to tune in better. That is, to sharpen our focus, strengthen our trust, deepen our commitment and gratitude – with prayer, reflection, Bible study, worship; whatever it takes to make sure the connection is solid. Friends, nothing we do during Lent could be more valuable than this! First and foremost, Jesus calls us to tune in better to God!

Then He calls us to **turn on...turn on to God's grace!** That is what it means to “**believe in the good news.**” Now, for long-time Christians, this may not seem such a challenge. Would we be here if we didn't believe in the good news? But you know, there is believing and then there is believing.

Have you ever been around new Christians? How fired up they can be! God's forgiveness means so much to them! Eternal life just blows them away! And how they treasure their personal relationship with Jesus! Talk about being turned on to God's grace! Talk about “**believing in the good news**”! But then we look at ourselves and wonder: *Why don't we feel that way?* And often it's because we take God's grace for granted. The good news doesn't seem much like news anymore, just...well...information. We believe it, of course. And we appreciate it. But the freshness and wonder have worn off. We take the Gospel for granted.

And let's be clear, that's not all bad. The great thing about the Gospel is that we can take it for granted! We don't have to wonder whether our sins are forgiven. They are! We don't have to wonder whether we'll go to heaven. We will! We don't have to wonder whether God loves us unconditionally! He does! That's the good news of the Gospel! But even though we can take the Gospel for granted, we don't want to take it for granted, because part of what keeps faith alive and fired up is realizing just how much God loves us! God didn't have to do anything for us, but He chose to out of love. Jesus didn't have to come suffer and die for us, but He chose to out of love. We are loved with a love so deep that “**neither death nor life...nor anything in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” Why, every breath we take is a gift from our loving God! Every problem we face is shared by our loving God! And whatever ups and downs we experience traveling through life, at the end of the road our destination is sure: an eternity in heaven, thanks to our loving God! Yes, that's the good news of the Gospel! And the more it sinks in here [*head*] and here [*heart*], the more real this love becomes for us, the less chance that it will ever be “just information.” We, too, will be turned on by God's grace!

That is why we use the season of Lent to reflect on God's great love for us – so that our believing will turn into believing! Especially as we reflect on Jesus, immerse ourselves in all He did for us on the cross, this love will sink in deeper, become more real. So in the weeks ahead, as part of our tuning in to God, let's be sure to spend time reflecting on Jesus, all He has done for us, all He means to us. That will give the good news a chance to sink in deeper. Prayerfully kneeling before Jesus, basking in His sheer mercy, will allow the Spirit to freshen up our faith. Thoughtfully reveling in Jesus' devotion to us, marveling at His willingness to save us, will allow the Spirit to restore our sense of wonder. Through such reflection, the Spirit will warm our hearts, will fire us up, will turn our believing into believing. So that is also Jesus' call to us during Lent. **Turn on more fully to His grace**

This brings us finally to “*drop out.*” And how does that fit Jesus’ call? Simple. It is response. As we “*tune in*” better to God and “*turn on*” more fully to His grace, our response is to **drop out...of whatever gets in the way of faithfulness.**

Many “religious” people would say this is the first thing we need to do. For instance, the Pharisees told people: *Clean up your act first so that you’ll be worthy to turn to God for mercy.* These days, there are some who preach a similar message: *Clean up your act first so that God can forgive you. Straighten up your life first so that Christ can save you.* And they call that preaching the Gospel! Really, it’s works righteousness – like: if we just do our part first, God will eventually do His. The Gospel teaches just the opposite: we’re saved by grace through faith for godly lives. God makes the first move, accepting us as we are, saving us by grace through faith; then gratitude inspires us to respond by cleaning up our act and dropping out of whatever gets in the way of faithfulness.

So, that said, let’s talk about response – the “*dropping out*” part. It’s no secret that a lot of what goes on around us runs contrary to God’s Will. Truth be told, our culture is increasingly impervious to guilt, grace, and God. So the challenge for us is how to live in this culture without buying into its values – how to be *in* the world but not *of* it. And that’s not an easy challenge. In fact, the better we “tune in” to God and “turn on” to grace, the more shocked we’ll probably be spotting ways we’ve already bought into our culture’s values – in our schedules, for instance, and our priorities. Also the acceptance of sins our culture gladly overlooks: like envy, greed, bad-mouthing others, or holding grudges. The fact is, true Christianity is a counter-culture. We don’t fit in with goes on around us, and we shouldn’t. That doesn’t mean we are to drop out entirely. That would be irresponsible. But to be true to God, there are activities and attitudes we need to “drop out” of. Lent is a good time to decide what they are and how to “drop out.”

Earlier, I mentioned the process of taking stock of our lives, identifying what doesn’t please God, then weeding the bad stuff out. Here is where that comes in – not as an arbitrary “have to” but as a grateful response to God. As He becomes more and more the focus of our lives, we will see how we need to rearrange our lives. And as God’s grace becomes more and more the power of our lives, we’ll want to rearrange our lives, too – rearrange them according to God’s values and priorities. Not that it will be easy, but it will feel so worthwhile. We’ll find life is much healthier, far more abundant, when we draw clear boundaries as to where we *will* fit in and where we will *not*. That is why, last but not least, Jesus calls us to **drop out of whatever gets in the way of faithfulness.**

So...“*tune in, turn on, drop out.*” Yes, it’s an odd slogan for a sermon, but rightly applied, it is what Jesus calls us to do as we begin the season of Lent. We know His actual words: “**Repent, and believe in the good news.**” Now let’s take them home and apply them. Let’s tune in better to God, turn on more fully to His grace, and drop out of whatever gets in the way of faithfulness. Amen.