Sermon: **“Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand”** (Matthew 4.17)

[1] Repent

Old-fashioned language and thus easy to dismiss. What does it mean? Visions of distraught listeners coming to the ‘sinners bench’ and in floods of tears confessing sins. We feel uncomfortable with the excessive emotionalism, the ritualism, and artificiality.

In Greek repent is µετανοια = change of mind. This is not emotional, ritual or artificial, but a decision; could be affected by emotion, enacted by ritual, even seem like artificiality, but is deep-down real.

As we look at ourselves (actions, words, attitudes & opinions) we might recognise imperfections.

This could make us feel uncomfortable about ourselves, or how we hurt others. Repentance deals with this.

[2] Kingdom of Heaven

Jews cautious about using the name of God. Use letters of YHWH with vowel sounds of Adonai.

This caution is why Matthew uses term Kingdom of Heaven not Kingdom of God.

This is where ‘God rules’ – the ‘rules of God’ apply, *and* ‘God is in charge’.

Thus quite different from here with man-made rules which clever folk get round, and the imperfect is in charge.

What would it be like? In some ways great, but think of what we bring to it that is not so good. This is why repent is so important, otherwise we cannot fit in, nor gain the benefit.

It would be awful to be outside Kingdom of Heaven, when you know how wonderful it is.

[3] At hand

Pie in the sky when you die! Yes, but here and now also. Not just far away, but at hand.

Constantine the Great became a Christian at his death so as to be absolved from as much of his sin as possible. In those days it was sometimes thought to sin after baptism meant no going to heaven.
“At hand” means we cannot put off making a decision.

But no one knows the hour of their death. Better like my mum to be Christian your whole life, however imperfect. For God is ever close, Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Don’t wait, act now!