Sermon on Proper 20 Year C 2022

It was devastating, our child telling us that his marriage was ending. Many of you have had similar experiences.

Our hearts were broken, we had been there, helping to plant the vineyard, giving our wisdom, supporting in ways we thought were helpful; hopeful that the vine they had planted would produce a rich wine for a lifetime but now only five years on the vineyard was about to be destroyed.

We felt the pain that Isaiah channels in his beautiful love song that turns bitter at the end; something so promising, over because…well it doesn’t seem God is altogether sure.

Was it something God did? Or was it that God gave them the room to develop, expecting that Israel would understand that it was God, in her midst, that was making for growth.

Instead it seems that Israel took God’s love for granted, didn’t understand that a love affair is mutual, most be fostered, nurtured, watered if the fine wine of a mature and lasting love is flourish.

Worshipping at the temple while you’re keeping other gods in play is religious adultery, devastating to the community, to the land, to themselves!

In this case the love sung turns into a lament for unrequited love, a love in which vows were made and then forsaken.

What can God do in a situation where human beings take the greatest of gifts for granted? Where we imagine that we can rape the earth, polluting its atmosphere, abusing it’s ecosystems and somehow imagine that it doesn’t matter, so settled in our ways, so comfortable in our routines, so mistaken in our theological understanding that we think God will simply, tolerantly, allow us to destroy the vineyard?

But God is the Truth; God is the truth in the midst of our society, our lives and in the center of our hearts. Truth is reality and God loves the world too much, is too passionately concerned for us that God will allow us to choose against the truth but not avoid it: God will tell us the truth!

It is in that spirit that we must read the love song, turned break-up tune in Isaiah; it is in that spirit that we are confronted by those, the heroes of faith who did not allow circumstances, the temptation to live comfortably in error, in injustice, stop them from manifesting the truth of faith in the living God.

And it is in that spirit that we must read some of the most uncomfortable words that Jesus has ever uttered “I came to bring fire to the earth….do not think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!

Here Jesus is channeling the passionate concern of the prophets, showing himself one of them. Here he is, using the word “stress” that we’ve looked at in the past few weeks in which he refers to the death he must die to complete this mission.

Here he talks about families that will be torn apart, not by actual violence but by his message, by the claims he is making.

That this then actually happened in Israel is unarguable. Some Jews believed that Jesus was the Messiah, most didn’t. And for a while this ripped the fabric of the society.

It wasn’t as if Jesus brought violence, whether fire or sword, but his presence, had.

If humans are determined to live in ignorance of ultimate reality and it’s call to loving justice God can either give us up to the consequences of that ignorance which is ultimately our demise or God can take the risk of coming among us and warning us know that such warnings will be scoffed at by some and embraced by others yielding a division, a rending of the soft, false unity that is actually a smokescreen for injustice and selfish fear.

God does this from love not from spite at being spurned. God does this for the sake of true peace, the peace that comes from living in harmony with what Jesus has achieved in his life, death and resurrection.

Like the Israel of Isaiah’s time that was in danger, and indeed would be crushed by Assyria for its dalliances and stupidity, Israel in Jesus’ time was in danger, and indeed would be crushed by Rome for it’s dalliances and reliance on violence.

Of course Rome deserves the blame for Jerusalem’s destruction but Israel’s dangerous political games with pointed to an ignorance of how to live in a realism that might have spared it the worst.

This is what Jesus refers to in the end of our passage, the capacity we have to actually track with reality. We use it all the time to figure out what the weather will do, what decisions we will make about any number of things. We don’t plan picnics in January and we don’t plan to ski in August.

And so we have the capacity to make plans when it comes to living well, in our relationships, in terms of economic, environmental, and social justice. These are attainable and, from many points of view plain as the noses on our face, or to use Isaiah’s image, the types of grapes that are growing from our actions.

The great composer Beethoven used to play a trick on polite salon audiences, especially when he was convinced that they weren’t really that interested in his music.

He would perform a piece on the piano, a slow, gentle, beautiful movement; it would be so slow and enchanting that almost everyone was lulled into thinking that the world was a soft, cozy place; people were starting to slumber and then, just as the final notes were dying away, Beethoven would bring his whole arm down on the keyboard producing a cacophony of sound and laugh at the shock this sent through his audience.

The world isn’t sipping a lovely hot mocca as the snow falls gently; when it is of course, recognize that as a reprieve, as a Thomas Kincaid moment in our lives.

We know that “the crisis” is coming. We might even say “the crises,” multiple.

It poses a challenge to each of us for we know not the hour that it will hit us personally, or communally. We know that it’s coming as surely as we know that dark cloud bank means a thunder storm.

There are those who want to deny this, there are those who seek to silence this truth.

The good news is that Jesus has entered the crisis full-on. He calls us to take action in our own lives because he has taken action for the sake of the world. We do not have to face the crisis without hope or without help and both will be there in abundance for us if we do one thing: face it, not suppress it, not pretend it doesn’t exist.

We would, the Church would, you and I would, be well advised to take action while there is still time. This might be as simple as taking truth seriously again, taking God seriously again, doing that work that will save your marriage; taking your part in developing this parish or beginning to pray again. It matters!

We understand “the peace” we offer each other not as a cozy pat on the back, but as an invitation to quell our fear in the presence of the Risen one, the One who Forgives, the One who loves us so much He tells us the truth!