

Lectionary 20C Pr 15  
August 14, 2022  
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Lakeland, FL

Isaiah 5:1-7  
Psalm 82  
Heb 11:29—12:2  
Luke 12:49-56

Grace to you and peace from God and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

In recent times I have come to appreciate YouTube as a teaching device. There was the time when I couldn't remember how to do "long tail cast on" for a new knitting project. There it was on the screen in front of me; step by step, so that I could follow along. And I just learned that my oldest was able to repair their dryer after watching YouTubes that showed him how. And I know that facilities managers turn to YouTube for guidance and help on any number of things – how to do certain maintenance, how to accomplish certain repairs. It's all there. And for these "do it yourself" projects and instructions, well, every step needs to be there so that you can learn in detail just how it is done. No mysteries. All must be explained.

Well, that is not the case with Holy Scripture now, is it? Sometimes a portion of scripture comes across as crystal clear – "love one another as I have loved you." Or "the Kingdom of Heaven is like a shepherd who had a flock of 100 sheep and he saw that one was missing so he left the 99 and went to find the one." Or "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." But then we come across a reading like today's Gospel and it leaves me shaking my head, frankly. We want to clearly understand everything in Scripture, to have it make sense and be plain. But that is not to be. There are parts of Scripture that hold mysteries that we cannot understand this side of eternity. And, truth be told, I hunch that there are more mysteries than we realize; that is, that parts that seem plain to us may well have much mystery beneath the surface that we do not see. And, so it is with this reading from St. Luke, a reading that may confound us or confuse us. One we may want to just flip the pages on. Yet, I rather think that there is indeed something here for us today.

So, let's look at today's reading. Jesus spoke these words – Fire I came to throw upon the earth; the baptism I am to be baptized with I am distressed until it is completed. Do you think I came to bring peace? No, rather division.

Hard words these are. When Jesus spoke them he was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. In Chapter 9 of the Gospel we are told that he set his face like flint to make this journey. In the years of his public ministry he had comforted and taught and healed and loved. And, he had no small number of arguments with the elite who thought that they had a lock on all things religious. These words were spoken to a people who lived in Roman-occupied lands where the gap between the haves and the have-nots was great; where people were very poor and very sick and eked out a living under the heavy hand of Rome.

And, so we read this today and search for meaning for our times, times that are "unprecedented." And doesn't this text grate against our longing for quietude and calm. Doesn't it make us want to say, "Wait now just a minute, Jesus – it's peace that I want. Enough of this discord and rankling and fighting."

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem for the last time – to the powers that be, to the fickle crowd that heralds him on his entry and then condemns him to death just days later. And even his last meal with his friends, a time of intimacy and love as he washed their feet, is marked by the presence of the betrayer. Where is the peace Lord? Where indeed.

Peace. The Hebrew word is “shalom” and it is this word that Jesus, as a good Jewish man, would have intended. Its meaning goes beyond the simple understanding we have today – it meant fullness and completeness; prosperity in the sense of well-being not wealth. Not merely the mere absence of discord. Wholeness.

We don't see much peace in our world today. And so the question is, what do we do about this? Do we simply turn off the news? Do we turn our head from that which discourages? Do we plug our ears and cover our eyes to not see that which is around us? It sure is tempting.

I believe that today's Gospel reading beckons us instead into the unsettledness, into the discord, into the rancor. Into this because we are marked with the sign of the cross of Christ – forever. Into it because we are kingdom-bearers even in the midst of all that is churning today. And that can be messy and uncomfortable but we too, having been washed and claimed in the waters of our baptisms, have set our faces toward the heavenly Jerusalem even while we live and serve here on earth.

Today the church commemorates two twentieth century martyrs – Maximilian Kolbe and Kaj Munk. Father Kolbe was a Franciscan priest who housed thousands of Polish Jews at his friary. He was arrested and sent to Auschwitz where he volunteered to starve to death so that his food could be given to a man who was a husband and a father. Two weeks later in 1941 he was executed. Kaj Munk was a Danish Lutheran pastor who was an outspoken critic of the Nazi regime and his writings and sermons strengthened the Danish resistance movement. He was executed by the Gestapo in 1944.

These two faced the ugly reality that surrounded them – not turning their heads, not turning off the news, not carrying on as if things were “normal” for they most certainly were not. They recognized the division that Jesus brings and did not gloss over it, sugar-coating it to make it more palatable. No, they saw it and carried the Kingdom of Heaven into its midst at great cost.

When Jesus was presented by Mary and Joseph at the Temple as a baby, Simeon prophesied “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed.” And to Mary he said, “And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” In other words, Jesus did not come to make everything “nice and easy.” Jesus came to stir trouble – “good trouble” as said Congressman John Lewis, may he rest in peace. Good trouble that militates against oppression and injustice. Good trouble that seeks truth rather than deceit. Good trouble that walks with determination and a clear eye to Jerusalem. In Hebrew: **Yerushalaim** – a compound word. Yeru – has multiple meanings – the abode or the flow or the way. And Shalom – peace. Jerusalem – the way of peace, of fullness and completeness.

There are many who have caused good trouble – that is, trouble that necessarily follows their work for shalom, for justice, for good news to the poor, release of the captives, recovery of sight

for the blind as Jesus said in his first sermon. Many names may come to mind – John Lewis, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Susan B Anthony, Harriet Tubman, Jane Adams and time would fail me to tell of all – as if I even could. These are shoulders on which we stand.

And because we are the baptized children of God we have promised to: proclaim the good news of God in Christ Jesus through word and deed, to serve all people following the example of Jesus and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth. This is not an easy task, but neither is it complicated. For as the writer of Hebrews said, Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us – not our neighbor's race, not someone else's race, but the race that is set before *us* – looking to Jesus who is the perfecter of our faith.

May it be so. Amen.