

10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 15, Year C  
A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger  
on August 17, 2025

Jeremiah 23:23-29 / Psalm 82 / Hebrews 11:29-12:2 / Luke 12:49-56

*Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;  
show the light of Your countenance,  
and we shall be saved. Amen.*

A Gallup Poll last September showed that a record-high percentage of US adults believe that Americans are greatly divided on our most important values<sup>1</sup>. Did Jesus predict this when He said:

*Five in one household will be divided, 3 against 2 and 2 against 3.*

In the Church, there is a heavy emphasis on reconciliation: that those who are divided can come to some mutual understanding and end hostilities. For we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, we must be reconciled with one another. It is a requirement to receive the Sacrament, which was once more explicit. *The Exhortation* on pp316-317 on the BCP was said at the beginning of the service for 500 years:

*Examine your lives and conduct ... Acknowledge your sins before  
Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life, being ready to  
make restitution for all injuries and wrongs done by you to others ...  
And then, being reconciled with one another, come to the banquet of  
that most heavenly Food.*

*The Exhortation* has been replaced with The Confession and Absolution.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.gallup.com/poll/650828/americans-agree-nation-divided-key-values.aspx>

But what does reconciliation look like in such a divided country and, may I point out, such a divided *county* that we live in? Is reconciliation even possible?

Personally, I don't hold out much hope. Our division is as deep as Jesus' demand that, as His followers, we are all-in, without hesitation and without fail. And if your family isn't as all-in as you are, then leave them behind.

One of characteristics of our time is that a lot of people are angry. Regardless of any one person or group's vision for the United States, there is a lot of anger. Anger alone isn't necessarily bad. Anger can motivate for good. Jesus often exhibited anger, like when He turned the tables in the Temple, when the Disciples prevented the little children from coming to Him, and in today's Gospel.

For me, on a societal level (not on the interpersonal level), "good anger" is that which motivates one to undo injustices – not something one dislikes, but true injustices that impact society, not just the self. "Good anger" is motivated by love of neighbor, the other, people you don't even know. "Bad anger" is borne out of self-interest. What alleviates that anger only benefits the person who is angry. *I got what I wanted, and I don't care about anyone else.* One type of anger is motivated by love of neighbor; the other type of anger is motivated by love of self and by hate. And I personally believe that it is this "bad anger" that is at the root of our divided nation.

This morning's reading from Jeremiah exposes that sort of selfishness that the corrupt prophets had. They were prophesying for their own dreams rather than for the good of all God's people. The prophets were deceiving the people, and they were getting in the way of the Divine word of God. And God was angry! God was angry at the injustices.

Getting underneath the anger is the start of the reconciliation process. But Jesus presents a scenario that is far beyond "agree to disagree". There's a binary solution: a wrong way and then His way, and His way is rooted in justice and love. In a way, Jesus is giving us permission to walk away if we choose not to follow Him, and we can have our own truth and to live with the consequences. The

divisions within the household – within the community – within the country – are just the beginning of those consequences.

Eventually, believes the Church, there will be reconciliation. Reconciliation is never easy, and reconciliation is never one-sided. We are reconciled to God through Christ, yet we must be repentant and accept Christ's forgiveness. If not, we are not reconciled – by definition. That is the same between humans. I can forgive you for how you have wronged me, but you neither have to repent nor say that you are sorry. You can be remorseful and apologize, but I don't have to accept that. In neither case is there reconciliation. But also there is no reconciliation without justice. It is simply performative for two opposing parties to come together, shake hands and "agree to disagree" if an injustice has not been addressed. As civil rights activist and writer James Baldwin once said in an interview:

*We can disagree and still love each other unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist.*

A decade before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formed, at the height of the oppressive apartheid regime, a group of mainly black theologians from South Africa issued what is called *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa*<sup>2</sup>. Near the end of the statement, they address the issue of reconciliation without justice head-on:

*'Church Theology' takes 'reconciliation' as the key to problem resolution. ... 'Church Theology' often describes the Christian stance in the following way: "We must be fair. We must listen to both sides of the story. If the two sides can only meet to talk and negotiate, they will sort out their differences and misunderstandings, and the conflict*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://sahistory.org.za/archive/challenge-church-theological-comment-political-crisis-south-africa-kairos-document-1985>

*will be resolved.” On the face of it this may sound very Christian. But is it?*

*The fallacy here is that ‘Reconciliation’ has been made into an absolute principle that must be applied in all cases of conflict or dissension. But not all cases of conflict are the same. We can imagine a private quarrel between two people or two groups whose differences are based upon misunderstandings. In such cases it would be appropriate to talk and negotiate to sort out the misunderstandings and to reconcile the two sides. But there are other conflicts in which one side is right and the other wrong. There are conflicts where one side is a fully armed and violent oppressor while the other side is defenseless and oppressed. There are conflicts that can only be described as the struggle between justice and injustice, good and evil, God and the devil. To speak of reconciling these two is not only a mistaken application of the Christian idea of reconciliation, it is a total betrayal of all that Christian faith has ever meant. Nowhere in the Bible or in Christian tradition has it ever been suggested that we ought to try to reconcile good and evil, God and the devil. We are supposed to do away with evil, injustice, oppression and sin – not come to terms with it. We are supposed to oppose, confront and reject the devil and not try to sup with the devil.*

Jesus knew – Jesus knows that there are the repentant and the unrepentant in the same households. Taking Luke ch12 as a whole, Jesus is warning us of the consequences of the binary choice between love of God and neighbor and love of self and material possessions. The two are not reconcilable. The Kairos Document makes Jesus’ warning clearer:

*No reconciliation is possible ~~in South Africa~~ without justice. What this means in practice is that no reconciliation, no forgiveness and no negotiations are possible without repentance. The Biblical teaching on reconciliation and forgiveness makes it quite clear that nobody*

*can be forgiven and reconciled with God unless he or she repents of their sins. Nor are we expected to forgive the unrepentant sinner.*<sup>3</sup>

So, anger is the root of division, and the solution is justice and repentance, and then reconciliation will follow. Since the 1960s, Latin American, Black and Feminist theologians spoke of 'liberation' instead of 'reconciliation'. Liberation theology begins by addressing the injustices that have been perpetuated by church and society. And whether in the households of which Jesus speaks, or in the structural racism of US culture, or in the violent and oppressive military dictatorships of Central America in the 1970s, or in the chaos that we are living through today, there are those who refuse to acknowledge and address the injustices and repent because those injustices benefit them or they don't want the discomfort of undoing them.

Jesus is puzzled by this self-interest, though. He points out that there are many intelligent people who can read the signs of daily challenges that bring about disaster, but they are blind to the societal and cultural crisis in front of them – they are ignoring the crisis. So, Jesus is shaking His head, and He tells them to go their own way if that's what they truly want ... but there will be consequences.

That same Gallup Poll last September had a graph that included past polls showing that 74% of Americans thought the country was *united* in November 2001, when we were still reeling from the attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11. Hopefully it doesn't take the greatest catastrophe and loss of civilian lives to bring us together again.

There are those who choose to love God and love neighbor so they fight against the injustices despite the consequences. Paul, in our lesson from Hebrews, speaks of those examples of brave people who fought against injustices in the name of the Love of God. There have been many since that Letter to the Hebrews, many even in our own time. We have a great cloud of witnesses as examples of work

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<sup>3</sup> <https://sahistory.org.za/archive/challenge-church-theological-comment-political-crisis-south-africa-kairos-document-1985>

toward justice. As a nation, we just never got to the repentance and reconciliation bit. We held the lid on our division, and now the lid is off. If we could take lessons from the Great Cloud of Witnesses throughout Christian history and American history, maybe we could get to a place of *justice* where and when the *reconciliation* can begin.

The United States is greatly divided. Jesus didn't so much predict this. He just knew that humanity is not committed enough to loving God and loving neighbor. And He knew that we are excellent at loving *self*. His angry words in today's Gospel are hard to hear and hard to find the message in them for us today. But Jesus came to point out the hard truths AND to be the Good Shepherd to us as we work our way through those hard truths. May we see the clouds rising and the winds blowing and then interpret our present time ... together.