

Year C, August 18, 2019
10 Pentecost (Proper 15)
Christ Church, Mexia

I don't know about you, but the readings this morning make me uncomfortable, and we are creatures of comfort, are we not? And I should note here that the entire Chapter 12 in Luke tells of Jesus trying to "fire-up" his disciples. For example, he begins by saying, they can kill you, but they can't eat you - (pause) well, not exactly - they can't hurt your soul - killing you is the worst they can do.

N.T. Wright shares a story about Beethoven: "He would perform a piece on the piano, one of his own slow movements perhaps, which would be so gentle and (so) beautiful that everyone would be lulled into thinking the world was a soft, cozy place, where they could think beautiful thoughts and relax into semi-slumber (while he played). Then, just as the final notes were dying away, Beethoven would bring his whole forearm down with a crash across the keyboard, and laugh at the shock he gave to the assembled company." This may mirror what Jesus is doing in the lesson today.

Jesus has been trying to get people, especially his disciples, excited about God and the New Covenant that will begin with his death. He has tried to get people to understand that the Kingdom of God is near, that it is coming to earth, and it is his followers' task and responsibility, and now ours, to help make that happen. But very few people seemed to grasp these concepts - very few seemed to be transformed - to exhibit the fire of the Spirit - to begin living in that expectation. So, let's get their attention and remind them that Christianity is not about comfort and peace all the time. There are rewards, but there are also costs.

Jesus believed in peace, wanted peace. He loved, and wanted us, to love our neighbors, but he understood that when you are trying to change things, sometimes there will be conflict, there will be differences of opinion. But part of being a Christian is to stand up when you feel the ways of God are being ignored. As Br. Vryhof, SSJE, observes: "It takes courage to name evil and to challenge it. It takes persistence to stand on the side of justice, especially when that opens us to ridicule, rejection or persecution. Following Jesus will often bring us into conflict with the pervasive values and the dominant culture of our time." Jesus was counter-cultural in his time, and it ultimately led to his death.

I am conflict averse and will try to avoid it when possible. But that isn't always the best course of action, especially for a Christian. Sadly, bringing God's Kingdom to earth, and the peace and wholeness that it implies, may cause division or exact a cost for me.

The Rev. Canon Logue puts it this way: "The greater peace will come at the cost of lesser peace. ... Lesser peace looks like a family distorting their lives to enable an abusive father's rages to inflict emotional and physical abuse while never letting those around them know that life at home is anything but ideal. Lesser peace is an eldest child falling into a prescription drug addiction, moving to heroin that consumes the child and then the family, as the denial continues until it's far too late and the deadly addiction is unstoppable. The signs of an affair are everywhere, but it is easier to pretend not to see them than to face the fracture already present in the marriage. The examples go on and on. We see problems. We say nothing and so try to keep the peace.

(These are just examples within a family setting), but the same problem is also (found in society at large). Across much of the history of our nation, the lesser peace treated formerly enslaved persons and their descendants as less than fully human. The Civil Rights Movement divided families precisely because the lesser peace came with no cost to those in power. It can seem tempting to want to return to the simple life with Andy and Opie Taylor in the fictional televised world of *Mayberry* without recalling that in that same time, if not in that fictional place, not all shared the same opportunities, the same rights. And we still have a long way to go before all God's children experience the wholeness and well-being that are the shalom found in the reign of God. ...

God's true and lasting peace, calls us to stand against the injustice (that we witness today in our culture, our world.) Anytime we preserve the peace at someone's or some group's expense, we trade God's shalom for a poor imitation." Therefore, we must speak, we must act.

Yes, we are sadly divided by many things today. But Jesus didn't come to divide us – though some will and do use Jesus as a way to divide. Jesus came to unite us – to make us one, as he and God are one. We are the ones who find ways to divide, when we should be finding ways to unite in love. The gift of speaking truth in love should not be the division we fear, but rather we should view it as the way to the greater peace for which we long, and as our Christian duty.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.