

Isaiah 5:1-7

Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

Luke 12:49-56

49“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! 50I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! 51Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! 52From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; 53they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” 54He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain’; and so it happens. 55And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. 56You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

WOW! What a dynamic speech! Jesus is really riled up here!

And what about the Old Testament lesson! God is telling the Israelites that they are like those wild grapes in the vineyard and he “will remove its hedge, and [they] shall be devoured; [he] will break down its wall and [they] shall be trampled down. [He] will make [them] a waste.”

Even the Epistle is a tad depressing today – all these great prophets and faithful people of the history of our faith, “suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented - of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. Yet all these thought they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promise . . .” See why I warned about the kiddies perhaps not staying for the sermon?

What is going on today in the church calendar that we have such a conglomeration of depressing and frightening scriptures?

I don’t know. But I could perhaps try to guess. Now are the long summer days coming to an end and in some areas school has already started back up. People are looking anxiously ahead to the return of the long hard grinding routine days of fall and winter. The summer variety and opportunities are slowing down and our zeal has perhaps waned a bit. Perhaps those mysterious members of the ecumenical group who chose the Lectionary readings for today took this into consideration when these scriptures were chosen for this time of year. They are a sort of wake up alarm!

“Don’t just sit there, do something!” They are screaming – Jesus was screaming, Isaiah was screaming.

I have to say this to the Lectionary writers – we beat you to it! I have such a hard time working out this sermon because I have just returned from Starfish camp and witnessed what this church has already been doing it! And it is amazing. Six years of this ministry – this dedication, and even though we may never know if our work has truly saved any child from becoming incarcerated themselves, we cling to the words from the Epistle, “Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.”

Pierrette McIntire has been responding to God’s call for 6 years now, and so many of you have responded as well to support her in fulfilling Terry Reister’s vision. I am so in awe of Camp Starfish and this congregation. And I don’t really know what that “something better” is that the writer of Hebrews is referring to. Perhaps the benefit from such things is so individual that it could not be expressed. But my sincere prayer is that each and everyone involved in this great act of love have received some warmth of heart - some love in the soul - some overwhelming knowledge that what was done last week at Camp Mary Mac & here on our property was a fervent act of God’s miraculous love on this earth. Wow.

The sermon text for today is Jesus calling out to those who listen to him to let this day be one where we are alert to the fear of God – the desire to do God’s will. For that is where we will find our true lives. The ones where we aren’t just going through the motions and responding to the social mores of the area of the earth we live in.

In this way I can explain the missionary zeal – for *wherever* humans are on this earth – regardless of the socio-economic situation or the accepted cultural behaviors – there is still a unique self in each one of us, which can only come to fruition with the help of Jesus. Jesus – because Jesus was **the** human who manifested pure God. He showed us that in God there are no borders between life and death / earth and spirit.

And it is Jesus who is telling us that he didn't come so that the world would all be the same sleepy acceptance of the status quo. "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." Jesus wants us to claim our God inspired power. We have more power in us than we realize, and Jesus was all about empowerment.

He taught against what the normal accepted understanding of the religious leaders was at the time. He seemed to be getting into trouble all the time with the accepted teachings – because he was calling for each soul to know God and claim God and trust themselves with that God. Human teachings can be imperfect – my words and interpretations of the scripture are imperfect – but each and every soul on this earth needs to wake up and claim the living God for themselves and know then what Jesus knew – that we are all a part of each other and of God – we can no longer go about living a life where we think we are separate from God.

Jesus calls for division from each other so that we will know our God. And when we know our God – and know our selves, then we discover the love which unites us with all the earth. Jesus calls us to discover our own power in order for us to confront fear. Jesus calls for our division so that we have the power to separate and stand out for something.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) separated ourselves to stand up for unity – and although it sounds ironic – it must not be dismissed. For the clarity and focus of our vision has made our message respected throughout the world. When we focus on a message it becomes clearer – and that is what Jesus was urging us all to do. To focus. He says he is under such urgency – stress it is translated here – until the message is clear.

Each of us has special gifts and talents and if we were all trying to be the same – if we weren't divided and focused we would not be able to offer those gifts.

I was having a discussion lately with someone and we were talking about a church leader who was saying something to the effect of, "we don't want them as a member" or "they just aren't church material". If all the members of a congregation were the same, then we wouldn't be the body of Christ – we would be only, perhaps, the fingernail of Christ.

We are called by Jesus to embrace our divisions – to stand up for our unique relationship with God – to fervently live our lives knowing the living God – embracing our lives with that God and trusting in ourselves and that God!

The hope we find is in today's Epistle, "let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God." "Looking to Jesus . . . perfecter of our faith . . . for the sake of joy . . . right hand of the throne of God." The scripture is telling us that Jesus is the way to discover ourselves and know this living God whom we are called to fill our lives with. This God whom we are to trust and even question all we have learned from the human designed faith – this God is real, Jesus proved it with his life. Jesus came to perfect that knowledge. And with that knowledge there is JOY.

Joy is an essential part of our faith – and it can be the result of division. Odd to think of division leading to joy – but maybe a recent news article will help clarify this. A woman named Rachael Rettner wrote an article in which she refers to a new study which suggests "A little arguing now and then is good for you . . . The results show when people experience tension with someone, whether their boss, spouse, or child, sidestepping confrontation could be bad for their health. Avoiding conflict was associated with more symptoms of physical problems the next day than was actually engaging in an argument. Bypassing bickering was also associated with abnormal rises and falls of the stress hormone cortisol throughout the day.

"Relationships have important influences on how we feel on a daily basis, especially the problems in our relationships," said study researcher Kira Birditt, of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. "How we deal with problems affects our daily well-being," she said.

Previous research has shown married couples who avoid arguments are more likely to die earlier than their expressive counterparts. Another study found that expressing anger contributes to a sense of control and optimism that doesn't exist in people who respond in a fearful manner."

As I have so often said – Jesus was the source of good psychology! We have so much to catch up on with him!