

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, the Rev. Karen Swanson
Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80: 1-2, 8-18; Hebrews 11:29-12:2; Luke 12:49-56

Today's Gospel reading is difficult. What I find most challenging are these words of Jesus: "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they 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."

I prefer unity in the family to division, and when family ties are weak, I pray that they will be strengthened. I pray to a God whom I believe forgives me and strives to create reconciliation between Him and me, and myself and others. I am dismayed by the deepening divisions in our country, and I ask God to help to heal them. I shake your hand and say "The peace of the Lord be always with you" believing that I am sharing God's blessing with you, and you with me. Do I believe that Jesus came to bring peace? Yes, I do.

In the very first chapter of Luke's Gospel, Zechariah sets the tone of the Gospel of Luke by announcing that his son John will prepare the way of the Lord by guiding the people's feet into the way of peace. In chapter two, the Christmas angels announce that the baby in the manger will bring peace on earth. In the last chapter of Luke, Jesus appears to the disciples and says, "Peace be with you." In between, Jesus offers peace to the woman of ill repute who washes his feet with her tears. When Jesus asks me, "Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth?" my immediate answer is "Yes." Jesus tells me, "Think again, more deeply."

Jesus' teachings in the gospels address the Kingdom of God more than any other topic. Initiating the Kingdom of God on earth is Jesus' purpose. Each week we pray that Jesus' purpose will be accomplished when we recite the words of the Lord's Prayer: "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done." Yet we don't often think about what it will take for God's kingdom to come.

God's kingdom comes when Jesus' ways are our ways, when we as people and as communities do what Jesus would do. In God's kingdom, every person is cherished as God's beloved. No one is rejected or looked down upon on the basis of his or her skin color, national origin, gender, status, wealth or intelligence. In God's kingdom, we recognize that we are related to one another as forgiven sinners, all of us equally in need of the kindness and mercy of God.

The coming of the Kingdom of God requires transformation. The person whom I see as angry or harsh may need transformation, but then so do I for my quick judgment. A man may see his wife as selfish, and a woman may see her husband as uncaring. Both need to change. One church may see another church as ritualistic and lifeless, and that church may see the other as emotional and not theologically grounded. Both need transformation. A political action group may decry white privilege, but discriminate against gays; another group may do just the opposite. I sin. Others sin. Hypocrisy abounds. Together we have built societal structures that are sinful: unjust and without compassion. Change is needed; transformation is required.

But, change is not easy! Transformation is often painful! We resist it, even when it is initiated by the Holy One. Perhaps we are too ashamed to admit what we have done . . . and not done. Or maybe we are terrified of what would happen if we dared to let go of some of our privilege. Whatever the reason, we dig in our heels, and fight transformative change.

We are not so different from those in Jesus' day who were not so sure about that upstart prophet and his disruptive ideas about God's kingdom, and all the changes it would require. It's not hard for either them or us to see how the world would become a better place if others would change, but when it comes to ourselves, well that's another matter. Sometimes we prefer the status quo, and its apparent peace.

Ahh, and so it is that when Jesus came in his day, and comes in ours, to bring holy fire that will purify us, and make us true citizens of God's kingdom, only some of us bravely welcome him. Others turn their back or shout "NO!" The coming of God's kingdom, with its requirements for change and growth divide us. Two against three, and three against two. Often we are divided not only among ourselves, but within ourselves. Today I may open my arms wide to Jesus, but tomorrow when he asks something difficult of me, I will push Him away, only to beg him to return next week.

Jesus wants to bring peace to us all, but some of us are not ready to be transformed in the ways that will make peace on earth possible. Our response to Jesus is what divides us. Some of us prefer the status quo, and the kind of shallow peace that represents only an absence of conflict, a band-aid on a festering wound of sin that needs thorough cleaning, and an antiseptic.

Others of us hear Jesus' say "I come to bring division" and realize that deep peace, the peace of God which passes all understanding, requires the courage to honestly, rigorously, and continually examine ourselves in the light of God's goodness, and offer ourselves to be purified by God's holy fire, to be transformed into a citizen of his kingdom. As a citizen of God's kingdom we will ourselves join God in moving the world toward peace by living and speaking truths which call for compassion, challenge injustice and demand a response. We ourselves will become agents of change and maybe even division. May our fiery God give us the strength to do exactly that.

In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

The Collect

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament

Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me sing for my beloved
my love-song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.
He dug it and cleared it of stones,
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;

he expected it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.
And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem
and people of Judah,
judge between me
and my vineyard.
What more was there to do for my vineyard
that I have not done in it?
When I expected it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes?
And now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge,
and it shall be devoured;
I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.
I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.
For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
he expected justice,
but saw bloodshed;
righteousness,
but heard a cry!

The Response

Psalm 80:1-2, 8-18

Qui regis Israel

- 1 **H**ear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock; *
shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.
- 2 In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, *
stir up your strength and come to help us.
- 8 You have brought a vine out of Egypt; *
you cast out the nations and planted it.
- 9 You prepared the ground for it; *
it took root and filled the land.

- 10 The mountains were covered by its shadow *
and the towering cedar trees by its boughs.
- 11 You stretched out its tendrils to the Sea *
and its branches to the River.
- 12 Why have you broken down its wall, *
so that all who pass by pluck off its grapes?
- 13 The wild boar of the forest has ravaged it, *
and the beasts of the field have grazed upon it.
- 14 Turn now, O God of hosts, look down from heaven;
behold and tend this vine; *
preserve what your right hand has planted.
- 15 They burn it with fire like rubbish; *
at the rebuke of your countenance let them perish.
- 16 Let your hand be upon the man of your right hand, *
the son of man you have made so strong for yourself.
- 17 And so will we never turn away from you; *
give us life, that we may call upon your Name.
- 18 Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; *
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

The Epistle

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets-- who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others 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, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, 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.

The Gospel

Luke 12:49-56

Jesus said, "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! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they 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."

He 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. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

In preparation for this coming Sunday's worship, please pray this coming Sunday's Collect of the Day and read and reflect on the lessons assigned as printed below

Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17

The Collect

Grant, O merciful God, that your Church, being gathered together in unity by your Holy Spirit, may show forth your power among all peoples, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament

Jeremiah 1:4-10

The word of the LORD came to me saying,

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." But the LORD said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am only a boy';
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you,

Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,

says the LORD."

Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,

"Now I have put my words in your mouth.
See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant."

The Response

Psalm 71:1-6

In te, Domine, speravi

- 1 In you, O LORD, have I taken refuge; *
let me never be ashamed.
- 2 In your righteousness, deliver me and set me free; *
incline your ear to me and save me.
- 3 Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe; *
you are my crag and my stronghold.
- 4 Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked, *
from the clutches of the evildoer and the oppressor.
- 5 For you are my hope, O Lord GOD, *
my confidence since I was young.
- 6 I have been sustained by you ever since I was born;
from my mother's womb you have been my strength; *
my praise shall be always of you.

or

The Epistle

Hebrews 12:18-29

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. (For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear.") But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the

righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what is shaken-- that is, created things-- so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

The Gospel

Luke 13:10-17

Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.