

Sermon for Sunday, August 18, 2019
Proper 15 C – Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio
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The Disturbing and Costly Peace of Jesus

Just ten days ago, Martha and I packed the car and headed off on vacation. We decided to drive somewhere we had never been before and to choose very judiciously what we would do with our precious time. Mostly, we needed to rest, to be in one another's company without distractions or agenda. And that is what we did. For the grace and renewal of that time, I am deeply grateful.

I am also grateful that in the Gospels, Jesus set an example for us of a spiritual rhythm of contemplation and action, of prayer and recreation away from the hustle and bustle, the blessings and the anxieties and burdens of vocation on mission for the Kin-dom of God. To follow Jesus, demands that we remain vigilant to the Way of Love that must include self-compassion, self-care, and the stewardship of our very own lives. Yes... vacation was exactly as Martha and I had hoped it would be and re-entry this week has been exceedingly busy and full of blessings.

So, when I consulted the lectionary having returned from vacation, my heart nearly beat out of my chest. Surely, I thought, you should have planned your next sermon better. After all, who wishes to move back into the pulpit after vacation and face into the fire and fury of Jesus this morning? Well, after more than a few deep breaths calling upon the Holy Spirit... I immersed myself in this text before us today. And I do not deny the hesitancy, the difficulty and the fear of doing so.

I can't help but recall Emily's powerful sermon last week focusing on the "peace that passes all understanding" ... "that peace that the world cannot give" ... and the powerful choices you and I have to surrender to the grace and healing that only God in Jesus Christ can offer. The "slamming of the tie on the ground" a kind of gesture that symbolizes our willingness to be totally dependent upon God for the peace that only Jesus can give when we

acknowledge our own helplessness. Thank you, Emily, for the gift of your wisdom, your grace, and your challenge.

Because as I immersed myself in Luke's gospel text before us today, what I needed to trust were those words from last week... the kind of peace I long for, the kind of peace you and I ache to receive and in receiving it, to offer it to those we meet along the way, is ***the peace that the world cannot give. It is only the peace of Jesus!***

Today, we come face to face with Jesus as the fire and the fury of his mission to bring to earth the kingdom of God for all God's people comes to full and furious boil.

As Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem, he becomes a flashpoint of conflict and opposition when he lays claim to startling forms of authority and power. His own words are marked with a sense of apocalyptic urgency and anguished intensity. The road to Jerusalem, after all leads to violent confrontation and death. And this urgency is only heightened by his Jewish faith that he, too, was living in apocalyptic times. The consummation of the world by the creator was nearing and so even Jesus, on mission to bring salvation to a broken, violent, oppressive world must be accomplished without haste or hesitation.

Sure, Jesus is hearing the growing demands of the religious and political authorities of the day for his elimination. There is a drumbeat here that is nearing the drowning out of his voice. And this is where we meet Jesus today.

If our world were nothing but a place of created goodness and profound beauty, a place of flourishing for all creatures and creation, then Jesus' words today would find no lasting meeting. Since, on the other hand, we can and must acknowledge that our world can be profoundly one of violence, hatred, and death-dealing injustices, replete with systems of meaning that are unsustainable and exploitative at best, and wreak havoc and death at their worst, then this text, in all honesty should not surprise us. Indeed, we should be ***expecting Jesus*** to shake us out of our denial, our comfort zones, our complacency, and our complicity with the systems of injustice that currently afflict so many of the beloved children of God.

We hear Jesus say, *"I came to bring fire to the earth... And do you think that I have come to bring peace... No, I tell you, but rather, division."* In order

to understand Jesus' words with the kind of urgency with which he addresses those who not only were following him but also those who dared to condemn him, we need to understand why he chooses to illustrate this by presenting the dismantling of the family, the households of his time. Households, in Jesus' time were the traditional systems that gave meaning and cohesion the entire culture. Households, especially familial and intergenerational ties in which kinship defined life and status, were at the very heart of Jesus' challenge.

Remember when Jesus asked, "Who are is my mother, and who are my brothers and sisters.... ? Those that do the will of God." Well, Jesus brings this saying full circle as he establishes households in the Divine economy that are not based solely on familial or intergenerational ties that give meaning to culture and society at large. Instead, Jesus turns the notion of family and household on its very head. This is Jesus who illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan that every one in need on the road of life is indeed neighbor, friend, and family member. In the end, no one, not one human being stands outside the infinite and expansive family of God's beloved children.

If one were to list ten of the hardest sayings in the Gospels, this particular text would rank right up there. And we, human beings are so hell-bent as to avoid such challenging and urgent words of Jesus. Rather, we find comfort and perhaps misconstrue the peace we feel as that which comes from Jesus, when in truth we settle only for the kind of peace that does not mess up our neatly defined, deceptively safe and undisturbed lives.

My friends in Christ, today you and I are put on notice. As Emily referenced in her sermon last week, God's peace, the Shalom of God is not just the absence of war, Shalom means wholeness, well-being, and health for all God's beloveds. Shalom is a truer, deeper, everlasting peace. A peace, indeed, that passes all understanding.

Today, we are instructed in the Way of Peace according to Jesus. It is a costly peace. It is a peace that does not enable, deny, or attempt to pretend away disease, abuse, addiction, injustice, oppression, exclusion or judgment of any kind. The Way of Peace according to Jesus takes on systems of injustice and speaks the truth in love without counting the cost whether in our families of origin, families of choice, spiritual families, or those systems political and legal that threaten the lives of the most vulnerable among the children of God.

Naming injustice and standing up for the Way of love will always be costly. However if we are to truly follow Jesus, there is no other choice. So, whether we fail to stand with those being bullied, with neighbors being denied human rights, with the hungry and poor denied equal access to health care and quality education, or avoid difficult and complex issues of gun violence, immigration and systemic racism, and somehow we do this “to keep the peace” ... ***we become complicit with the very systems Jesus condemns today.***

Perhaps we are deluding ourselves by asking a question that really doesn't much matter: “Why did Jesus teach that following him would be divisive?” Only to avoid asking the more challenging and in truth more troubling question: ***Why does our faith in Jesus never truly disturb anyone?*** How do you and I face into the fire and fury, the urgency of our faith in Jesus Christ in matters of life and death not only for our selves but for our brothers and sisters and Creation itself?

A very wise mentor of mine once said to me, “Judith, if you are not the recipient of resistance, push-back, or criticism, perhaps you are not fully engaged in the mission of Jesus Christ.” I stand here believing that and in the very same moment, trembling at its truth.

My friends, how far are we willing to go when it comes to disturbing the peace? Are we willing to entertain ***only*** the peace that is the lesser peace of this world? The most important question of all is this... ***How far are we willing to go when it comes to witnessing to the disturbing and costly peace of Jesus?***

Amen.