

**Year C, 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 15c**

**August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**By Thomas L. Truby**

**Luke 12:49-56**

### **Bringing Division!**

“Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, I have come instead to bring division.” And the division goes right to the heart of the family; fathers against sons and mothers against daughters and three against two. Discord and disruption, heartache and betrayal, violence and war all appear on the increase. If this is what Jesus sought to bring, his mission appears successful.

Jesus is on his way toward Jerusalem and his crucifixion. Somehow his crucifixion will cast fire upon the earth. It will ignite a process that will continue for millennia. Jesus wishes it were over, like surgery that must be gone through, and he is just about to go into it.

He speaks of his coming crucifixion as a baptism that he has to experience. There is no way to avoid it. In his baptism he will allow himself to be immersed in something so overwhelming that it will bury him.

What is it that he is about to be immersed in? It's not water like his original baptism by John the Baptist. It's not the baptism of the Holy Spirit where he hears a voice saying this is my son in whom I am well pleased. No! He is about to be immersed in human violence. It is the same irrational, barbaric, terrifying violence that we see in the streets of Aleppo and that can erupt anywhere at any time.

We thought he was coming to bring peace to the earth. Everywhere everyone wants peace; even those in the midst of war wage it thinking it will bring or preserve peace. We cast fire upon the earth hoping to destroy the enemies to our peace. We (humans) burn their food, cut off their water, and bulldoze their houses to bring them into submission so that the world can have peace. We threaten our enemies with nuclear annihilation to keep them from attacking us and so hold the world hostage through the threat of violence.

These are things humans have done to each other since civilization began. How did the crucifixion of Jesus set the world afire when it seems to have been full of flames already?

He tells the crowds they are hypocrites for not seeing something as obvious as rain clouds forming to the west and hot winds coming from the south. What are they not seeing that prevents them from accurately interpreting their times?

Jesus moves toward Jerusalem knowing that he is about to become the victim of human violence. He is choosing to do this. He knows what he is doing. He will experience public shame by being taunted and whipped, they will torture him and humiliate him, they will strip him naked and accuse him falsely, and he will take it. While he could destroy them, he won't. He will go through it, it is his baptism and he wishes it were over. They will kill him though he is

innocent and he will die. As he dies, between gasps for air, he will mutter “Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.”

“They don’t know what they are doing.” That is literally true. They don’t see that they pour their wrath, held toward each other, on to their victim who is innocent and kill him thinking they are ridding themselves of evil when all along the evil is in them and between them. This is what they cannot see. It is as obvious as storm clouds in the west bringing rain and south winds bringing heat, but they refuse to see it. They want to blame the victim so that they can avoid seeing the truth and turning on each other. They form a false unity around the lie that the victim is actually the problem.

Successful cultures, those that have flourished for a time, all discovered a common mechanism. When tensions got to a certain point, and it seemed they would all turn on each other and tear each other to shreds, they turned instead on one of their own, usually the one most vulnerable, and cast them out or destroyed them. They discovered how pointing the finger of blame at someone who then suddenly became the cause of the poison they knew was in the air and expelling them, cleared the air. It worked incredibly well and kept them from imploding. In fact, the relief they felt was so tangible, so powerful, so pervasive that they said to themselves surely this one we cast out must have been a God. When things get tense we will need to do this again. And so they sacrificed human beings!

To maintain enough unity to function cultures had to have victims but they couldn’t know that was what they were doing because then it wouldn’t work. They had to hide it from themselves. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “Hypocrites! You know how to interpret conditions on earth and in the sky. How is it that you don’t know how to interpret the present time?” This is how the present time works. This is the way we keep the peace. We build unity by blaming and throwing out and we refuse to see that we do it. We build this mechanism into how we do things. This is the root of systematic racism and international conflict.

The majority maintain their sense of us-ness, and keep from turning on each other by violently rejecting some who they see as lesser, dangerous or different. In our country (and every culture has a different list) we have used African-Americans, Hispanics, Japanese, American Indians, women and people of different sexual orientations to bolster our unity through exclusion.

Now most of us know that gay people are no different than straight people, Hispanics are as human as African Americans and that white males are not inherently superior and meant to rule. And our children know this at a deeper and more intuitive level than we do. That’s why homosexuality and inter-racial marriage just aren’t an issue for many of them. This change in culture is happening very quickly and it is a bit frightening. The message of the cross is penetrating culture. This old world of special privilege for a few is what some of our politicians are trying to preserve or bring back. It’s creating a lot of division even between fathers and sons, mothers and daughter.

The crucifixion of Jesus is the event that exposed the mechanism. This is the first time that we humans were forced to see that we were killing an innocent man and behind him millions upon

millions of innocent people. Because God loves all people, God as an act of love revealed what we do so that we would stop it. God takes human form and occupies the place of shame, the place of the victim; and from that place forgives us. The forgiveness makes it possible for us to see it for otherwise; we would continue to deny it. The revelation shatters the false peace built on a lie.

Our crutch has been taken away. The old way of founding and maintaining culture is losing its effectiveness and so we redouble the amount of it we use. Our culture and others are like violence addicts who must increase the dosage. This is why the crucifixion of Jesus increases the violence in these last days. (And I think the last days are those between his crucifixion and his coming again and I do believe he is coming again.) The superficial, costly and fragile unity we have always relied on is coming undone. As the message of the cross penetrates the world, the truth that the ones we cast out are innocent or at least no guiltier than we, sets the world on fire.

Now the passage Jesus read from Isaiah, announcing his purpose in coming, where he leaves off the part about wrath, the part they wanted to hear, makes more sense.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor. (Who are the first to suffer human violence?)

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives (How many does the United States have incarcerated? Two million!)

and recovery of sight to the blind, (Blindness is far more than a physical condition.)

to let the oppressed go free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (We live in the year of the Lord's favor.)

With the old way of keeping the peace being undermined by truth, we will either join Jesus in setting the world free or we will destroy ourselves in an apocalypse (The usual meaning of this word) of our own making. Amen.