

Sermon 17 August 2025 11am, proper 15, Trinity 9

Jer. 23:23-29; Ps 80:1-2, 8-18; Heb. 11:29-12:2; Luke 12:49-56

May I speak in the name of the living God, F, S and HS. Amen.

It's been a busy summer so far! There have been meetings, e-mails, phone calls, journeys, people to meet, and things to do. We've cooked, done laundry, and fixed broken things. We've attended weddings and funerals, shopped, fed the dog, and gardened. Business as usual, right? Our constant busyness fools us into thinking we have everything under control, if we keep crossing things off our 'To Do' lists.

And amid checking our lists, Jesus, the King of Kings and Prince of Peace calls us names in frustration at our blindness and foolishness. You think I'm making this up? If we were looking for trouble in a preaching text, this one has plenty.

Not an easy passage, is it? Jesus and his disciples were on their final journey to Jerusalem. As Jesus moved ever closer to his death, a sense of urgency must have arisen in him. His disciples still did not understand about God's Kingdom. They needed the Wisdom we heard about in our gradual anthem, a beautiful rendition by our choir of O Virtus Sapientie by Hildegard von Bingen. Their ideal Messiah was a military champion, someone to bring down the Roman Empire and a king who would restore the throne of David. They were not looking for a King on a heavenly throne, a servant king, or one who would be tortured and executed; Not **That . kind . of .**

King.

How frustrating for Jesus. He taught the disciples with stories and parables about the way the Kingdom of God works, and they still didn't get it. Sometimes there was a glimmer of understanding, but mostly not. Jesus atypically starts yelling – first at the twelve, and then the crowds. Jesus, who recently rebuked James and John for wanting to bring down fire on unfriendly Samaritans, suddenly declares that he can't wait to bring down fire himself.

There is a difference between cleansing fire and fire that consumes. James and John wanted to destroy, but Jesus is talking about cleansing, purifying fire. He knows what lies ahead for him and his disciples, and he wants to ensure they have been refined and tested, so that they remain strong when the time comes.

And that time is **very near**. Very soon, Jesus will ride a donkey into Jerusalem while the crowds shout 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' A few days later, the same crowds will cry out 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' He will be led to Golgotha, the place of the skull, hung on a cross, and crucified. The prophets' words will soon be fulfilled. The baptism Jesus is about to undergo is very soon, as he takes on the sins of the entire world.

Today's Jesus seems out of character with the Jesus who loves, heals and cares for the poor. This is not the sweet baby Jesus for whom the angels sang, 'Peace on earth, good will to all',

back in Luke 2. No, this Jesus announces division instead of peace. Jesus has come to set in motion God's radical will for the world. He is totally absorbed in his mission to redeem a broken world.

Isn't it interesting that Jesus compares 'peace' with 'division', treating them as opposites? We think of the opposite of peace as war, and the opposite of division as unity. But Jesus is saying any division is war, and there can be no peace without complete unity, something that sadly Trump and Putin failed to put in place for the Ukrainian people. If we look at this passage considering the whole gospel story, perhaps it describes rather than advocates division among us. It is not Jesus' purpose to set children against their parent or parents against their children, but this separation can be the **result** of the changes brought about by Christ's work.

The divisions Jesus lists are between generations. Jesus says that family ties no longer determine a person's identity, vocation, allegiance, and status. Instead, they will be measures by whether that person accepts or denies Jesus as Lord. What ties believers together is not the covenant of ancestry, but the covenant of blood – Jesus' blood – poured out for those who find fellowship in the family of God.

The harsh sayings and accusations in this text remind us that Jesus came to turn our ideas of social hierarchy up-side-down; those social hierarchies that favour people who hold positions

of power at the expense of those who are powerless. The radical purposes of God have rewritten the status quo, how we want to operate. Jesus shatters it with his mission of compassion, mercy, and justice. Standing with Jesus will separate us from those who deny his Lordship. Coming alongside Jesus in his mission will certainly divide us from those who fear giving up their positions of power to bring peace and justice to others. God's divine plan for peace is not always welcome.

In hilly areas, we know that rainfall occurs ascending the hill and it is dry on the other side. People knew rain was due by noticing a small cloud in the west. And a southerly wind, from the desert, meant scorching weather.

Jesus says they are hypocritical because they don't recognise that the day of the Lord is near. In Luke 11, Jesus chastises the crowds because they keep asking for a sign that he is the Messiah. Now, he chastises them for their complete inability to interpret the signs they are given. If we can read the weather cues, why not the signs of the times? The problem is not being unable to interpret the signs of the times, but more that we are unwilling to do so.

So what time is it getting to be? What are the current concerns of the Kingdom, which Jesus is so eager to bring about? How are we being hypocrites, and short-sighted about 'the way things are,' and missing the point? Maybe we think the

problem is too big, like providing affordable housing, achieving peace or climate change? Maybe we think the problem is so endemic that there's nothing to be done. Jesus holds division and peace in tension and asks us to interpret the times through God's clock. What time is it? The same time it was 2000 years ago. Time to wake up. Time to open our eyes and see what God sees. Time to repent of our complacency, our hypocrisy, our willingness to act one way in public and be something else in private, our willingness to maintain the status quo instead of moving radically into the demands of Kingdom living. It's time to take a good hard look at who we are, and what we do, and see how far it is from what Jesus asks of us. It's time to realise that the weather is shifting. Paul writing to the Corinthians says, 'See, **now is the acceptable time**; see, now is the day of salvation!' It's time to become authentic followers of Jesus Christ. The time is now. The Kingdom of God is at hand. **Amen.**

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