



SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Sermon for Sunday, August 18, 2019

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

FR. ALAN GIBSON

Jeremiah 23:23-29 | Psalm 82 | Hebrews 11:29-12:2 | Luke 12:49-56

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus said, "I came to bring fire to the earth....Do you think I have come to bring peace...? No, I tell you, but rather division!"

Well, Lord Jesus, thank you so very much for the offer, but we have quite enough of that already. We have more than enough of division, of people turning guns on each other, and madmen ranting vile slander against anyone who looks, thinks or speaks differently from them. We don't need any more "fire on earth." We have enough of all of that already to break our hearts and we're exhausted. We've learned to take it for granted that life is going to dish up plenty of strange gifts. Why would we want one more from you?

Well, we don't. But that is what Jesus has to offer. His gift is to break our hearts. Which sounds much more like a condemnation than anything else. All around us the world seems to be going to hell in a handbasket. We used to duck and cover and just worry about the Russians dropping an atomic bomb on our heads. (Doesn't that seem like a lifetime ago?) And even though we soon may be practicing that routine again, we now worry about threats that seemingly come from everywhere. In the one hope we might have to find refuge, Jesus promises division. And we still pray for peace.

Why does violence pervade the earth? Why do madmen seek to destroy countless lives? Why do human atrocities happen every day? For every crime there are many theories for its cause. Revenge, psychosis, media influence, oppression, abuse, neglect, selfishness, religious fanaticism, disinformation, lack of moral training. Take your pick – or all of the above, and more. One characteristic that is consistent in every one of these horrors is that something inside, something at the level of the heart is closed, cold and locked-up. And I'm not talking about the people who pick up guns, or make bombs, or tweet instead of think. Their hearts are too terrifying to even begin to understand them. The people whose hearts have retreated behind protective shielding -- they are us.

We follow the news and we wonder how such terrible things can happen. We feel sorry for those who suffer, we may even pray for those touched by these tragedies, and we go on. But do our hearts break? Or do our hearts take it all for granted? One way to tell is to see what comes out of them.

If we look at the world and then look at our own hearts, do we see two messes or just one? Is what we see inside just a bunch of bandaids and good intentions struggling to hold the pieces together? Or is it something that's been torn apart? If Christ's love is going to be found anywhere, it's going to be in the midst of the wreckage of human hearts. Our defenses have to be broken down and our hearts remade in the image of Christ's heart before his love can flow through them. We have to be willing to take the risk of being hurt by being willing to identify with those who are, as Christ did. That's the only way his love can use us to begin to heal the world, and our own selves.

Jesus didn't say that he wanted people to be gunned down, or for children to turn on their parents. Lives are too precious. He wants us to step out of ourselves and risk healing suffering. He wants us to be willing to love enough to be rejected, and have our hearts broken in doing it, because if we don't face the frightening things life has to offer, our fears will destroy us. Jesus is telling us we can't run, we can't hide, we can't seal ourselves off from a world of brokenness. He calls us to sift through the wreckage, to pull the pieces apart, so his love can shine through.

"Five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three...father against son...daughter against mother...mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law." No one starts out that way. Division only occurs when we retreat, when we close our minds and our hearts. It's not such a big step to go from a family feud to an act of terror. Where are the divisions, where is the fire consuming our lives and the lives of those we love? It's scary to look at that, but it's even scarier to think what could happen if we don't face those demons. Walls must come down, especially the walls that have been so carefully constructed to resemble a tomb for well-protected hearts. Jesus never built a wall, only humans make such things.

Jesus tells us that he'll break our hearts, but his love is also what will remake them and bring us the peace for which we pray. It's a strange way to give a gift, but for a world that's so used to division, peace probably looks more like a condemnation than a gift. A world of peace will bear no resemblance to what we take for granted. But if we take the risk of accepting Christ's gift, we'll never take him or the peace he offers for granted, again.