

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 18, 2019

By Sister Patricia Crowley, OSB

Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10; Hebrews 12:1-4 Luke 12: 49-53

Jesus came to bring peace. Isn't that what the angels sang at his birth and what we wish for one another each day at Mass? Isn't peace what we often post at our entrances to wish all the peace of Christ? Jesus declared that peacemakers were blessed. He taught his followers to turn the other cheek when slapped on one cheek. And he wept over Jerusalem because it rejected the things that make for peace. Jesus' followers proclaimed the gospel of peace and Paul saw himself as an ambassador of reconciliation. Jesus was surely no promoter of division but the Prince of Peace.

It is easy for us to forget the message of today's gospel selection. We can forget how disruptive Jesus was to his own society and how very startling his messages were to those who knew him and to those who didn't know him.

We easily forget or ignore the poetic interruptions to that approach presented to us by this gospel selection.

If we but listen with the ears of our hearts.

This is serious business – this Christ event in human history. This Lucan passage and its counterpart in the gospel of Matthew prod us to remember how unsettling that event was to the status quo.

Many think the main task of Christianity is “law and order”. In fact, a great deal of emphasis on what the law requires in the Judeo-Christian tradition and in our own church over the centuries. Some of the most poignant scriptural passages are about the law – for example, yesterday the first reading was about the law as Josue laid it out for the people as they entered “the promised land” and the day before we heard of Jesus being questioned about marriage and divorce.

We are very accustomed in our own society to a “law and order” approach to life, even though in this day and age, that law has often been interpreted in questionable ways.

So, what might we make of this passage in terms of two words used therein: The image of fire. Some preachers today might say that fire stands for love or the kingdom / kingdom promised by Jesus or as the purification that comes with suffering

In the Old Testament –

1. Gm 19: 24 Sodom and Gomorrah
2. Ex 9:3 fire and hailstorm on Egyptians
3. 2 Kings 9:17 Elijah to consume 50 soldiers
4. 1 Kings 18:38 Elijah to consume his sacrifice

When the Divine touches the earth – often described as a spark or a fire..... I will come back to that in a moment.

The prediction of many divisions. Jesus describes this in terms of family members turning against one another. Indeed, that has happened. And today those divisions are even more pronounced as families are unable to communicate sensibly about the social practices of our own country, just take the immigration situation as an example. Jesus did bring division and it is evident in his life and, of course, in his death.

This kind of division is so evident in our Church and those differences of opinion and practices impact families greatly. I just received an email from one cousin whose family is of the Steubenville ilk and a call from another who strongly prefers the National Catholic Register to the National Catholic Reporter. The differences are so clear and they are divisive. I find that difficult within our own family.

History books are filled with tales of wars caused by religious differences. The people of El Paso spoke out last week with signs that read – “Hate not welcome aqui” - or through the columns in NCR’s Theology en la Plaza – about divisions based on what we look like or where we were born or when we came to this land.....

Sense of being superior to someone else – At one point we, as Catholics, were taught that only Catholics would go to heaven. In our country and in others too, we see trends of the kind of white nationalism that fueled the Nazi regime and World War II.

One commentator quotes the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar warned Christians about the danger of getting involved with God. He said that God offers us the impossible. God draws us beyond our limits into the divine adventure, which is always fatal." The purpose of Jesus' mission was peace but his presence would inevitably divide. To follow Jesus wholeheartedly and uncompromisingly incurs hostility.

Our second reading from Hebrews describes part of the way we navigate the waters of this gospel passage as it describes a “cloud of witnesses” who surround us..... We have so many! I would mention Dick and Ann Heidkamp whose 50th Anniversary was celebrated last evening with a splendid gathering, and so many of our ancestors who have been true to the gospel message and who, in the process, may have antagonized some.

Our first reading is a dramatic account of Jeremiah, who spoke out in ancient Israel and, because his message annoyed and contradicted some in power, he was cast into a cistern to sink in the mud. And then there Ebed-melech, the court official, who had the courage to speak out on his behalf and was able to get Jeremiah out of the mud.

Today, a young man named Scott Warren is now facing 20 years in prison for working with “No More Deaths” an Arizona group that puts water out in the desert for migrants who have come many, many miles across that desert – giving drink to the thirsty.

Michael Pflieger, while following the gospel call in strong vocal ways in the African American community in Chicago, experiences hostility from many.

You all could name so many “witnesses” that surround us as we try to live the Gospel message in so many areas of our society and world. The Christian responsibility to confront falsehood and to tell the truth even in hostile / dangerous crises is clearly the call of the gospel today.

Jesus does not seem to tolerate peace at any cost or the peace of the status quo. As gospel people we are called to be uncomfortable and to make people uncomfortable

To be his faithful disciple and never be afraid to walk where he has led, to tell the truth, to confront injustice, to have courage in difficult situations. It is when we take the gospel seriously, that we, as Christians, are called to play with fire!

A few of the phrases in this reflection are taken from a homily by [I. G. Spong](#) on Aug 11, 2019 and some from Mary McGloine’s column in the National Catholic Reporter this week.