

Sermon SPBX 8-14-16 The Rev. Jamie Samilio – Proper 14

If we live the way God wants us to live, we need to do it on purpose.

The Gospel today is one that makes a preacher cringe. How am I to stand here and quote Jesus – the one we call the Prince of Peace with His words, "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! And, "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided..."

What in the world could this mean? Is it sarcasm? Was Jesus upset – clearly the tone of this message is not typical of other lessons and parables. I had to step back and ask, what would it take to divide families against each other. I did not have to think very hard, it was clear. War, money, justice, class systems, greed, power, politics pick a topic as there are many.

Liz had an excellent message in her weekly e-news titled, "What happened to the prince of peace?"

"The gospel message that Jesus brings.....the good news of the kingdom of God.....love thy neighbor and justice for all is NOT the world that Jesus is living in or preaching in. What Jesus is talking about will completely disrupt the social order. If it comes to pass it will totally shift the balance of power. The wealthy and the powerful will no longer be the ones in control. It is no wonder that Jesus' message creates division and discord. Some people long for the 'kingdom of God' and others will do anything to prevent the overturning of the social order they built and control. It's understandable that the divisions in families that Jesus describes, will be along generational lines, for aren't the young always the ones who are idealistic and want to create a better future than their parents provided in the present? It's not that Jesus is divisive, it's that the way people react to his message is divisive. Not everybody is buying into it! But everyone's reaction to it is fierce."

So Jesus says he is coming to bring fire, but I do not think it means fire in the way we think. I think the fire is that of the Holy Spirit igniting us in the

service of Christ. This passage is a warning from Jesus about our willingness to hear and see only what we want to. If we want to follow Jesus, we need to trust God, and listen to the voice within telling us to do the right thing – even if it does not serve us as well as we would like. **If we live the way God wants us to live, we need to do it on purpose.**

To get a little more clarity I went back to the scriptures from last week. There were two, one that told us that where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also. And told us to be ever ready, ever right with ourselves and our neighbors for we do not know the day and the hour that the Master will come. The Letter from Paul today to the Hebrews reminds us that we are weighed down with our own sin, and we need to be ready.

The other scripture is from last week is from the Transfiguration on Saturday, where Moses and Elijah met Jesus on the mountain with Peter, James, and John as witnesses.

The figures of **Moses and Elijah** who appeared and talked with Jesus about His death, a death that was rapidly approaching, is also significant because they represented the **Law and the Prophets**. God's voice came from heaven and said, "**Listen to Him!**" This clearly showed that the Law and the Prophets must give way to Jesus. Jesus is the new and living "**Way**" and He is replacing the old – **He is the fulfillment of the Law and prophecies from the Old Testament**. The disciples saw a preview of Jesus' coming glorification as King of kings and Lord of lords. And they never forgot what happened that day on the mountain.

The disciples may not have forgotten what they experienced on the mountain, but how are we doing at remembering that Jesus is the way, and what we do in the world, matters? What would Jesus say to us if he came here today and saw all the division we have in our world?

Following Jesus is not the easiest path to take, and the Gospel does not always carry a happy go lucky message. If loving God and our neighbors was simple and easy – everyone would do it. Loving other people is easy

when we are not jealous, prideful, angry, entitled, frustrated, struggling, confused, overwhelmed, or busy. When are we completely free of all of these things? Disagreement and strife happens in families as the natural course of human interactions, because we have different perspectives and goals. There is no doubt that many churches have experienced division at some time in their histories – this one included. The problem may not lie in the division itself, but in how we respond to the divisions that happen in our lives. **What we do, how we respond matters. If we live the way God wants us to live, we need to do it on purpose.**

Tearing down and rebuilding is what people do. Things of this earth are temporary, and the best we can do is stick together and support each other as we make our way as followers of Christ. Without endings there cannot be new beginnings, and this Gospel is where Jesus is clear that the old ways of operating as a self-serving people are over, and we need to be world serving and God worshiping people. This change will not be comfortable for everyone and that is where the families will divide – but only if we stop focusing on Jesus. Jesus is with us all the way. Even if we fail, He is there to cheer us on for taking up the good fight in good faith. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Some final thoughts, I found this one on Facebook: Everyday of your life needs to be a journey with God. We need to humble ourselves and do things, God's way. If you want the high life, you have to give up the low life and refuse to live for yourself alone. If you take care of God's business, God will take care of yours. There is nothing more powerful about caring for people, than walking in love, because **what we do, how we respond to others, and to our situations, matters. We have an opportunity to build up the Body of Christ everyday, and it starts with having faith in God, faith in ourselves, and love for our neighbors. If we live the way God wants us to live, we need to do it on purpose.**

As for reading the signs of the times, I am not sure any of us will be able to predict any outcome with accuracy, yet I am fairly confident that we can

impact an outcome and change the course of our direction if we all work together. We are subject to the laws of nature, and those things we cannot control – there is a difference between predicting a thunderstorm coming, and stopping the rain from falling.

We can see in our political arena, our environmental issues, and our response to the increasing globalization of our world, classic signs of power struggles. While we can see division brewing in the political arena, we are not required to engage in the mud slinging. We are also not required to tolerate hate and injustice in the world. Even if we are not engaged in unjust practices, we also cannot remain complacent. When laws are made to serve the few, and our norms include marginalizing the most fragile of our fellow humans, and that comes into conflict with our own personal interests, we have to do the right thing. We can change the outcomes of what is happening in our homes, our church, and our world, because we can control our thoughts, our words, and our actions.

We have to tear down what is not serving us all, and build up each other, as individuals, as St. Paul's, as Members of the Diocese of Virginia, as people of the United States, as citizens of the world. "Love is the opening door, love is what we came here for." (Elton John)

I leave you today with a quote from Bob Marley: "Live for yourself and you will live in vain. Live for others and you will live again." Amen