

Sermon  
August 17, 2025

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

Today's words from Jesus are about Change. They are about the painful rupture that sometimes must take place when change is necessary. Everyone here has experienced some form of painful change.

For my father, it was the Beatles haircut. Shoulder-length hair worn by men just about did him in.

As we walk through this passage today, I invite you to think about where you have been asked to change by God. And near the end of this passage, I want you to hear how Jesus asks his listeners to trust him, -to trust in the new Way they are being asked to turn by a loving and faithful God. What new steps are you being called to take in faith and with trust?

In today's reading, Jesus speaks of bringing Fire to the earth and division. On first read, this isn't reassuring. This isn't comforting. How can Jesus tell a parable of reconciliation between father and son at one time and, at another time, give us a message that sets parents against their children and children against their parents?

Isn't Jesus the one who heals with blessings of peace?

Did he not teach his followers to bring greetings of peace as they traveled the country to share his good news?

So, what do we make of Jesus' words of division? (informed from page 358, Audrey West, Feasting of the Word, vol 3).

These words of Jesus, recorded by Luke, take the long view. They convey a message that does not directly address peace or reconciliation. Instead, this message points us in the direction of peace and reconciliation. This passage is about process.

We are told that the way to reach this goal of peace and reconciliation is through change. Jesus proclaims that the Hope and Joy that comes from God must come through seeing our lives from a different perspective –a perspective that might set us apart from those around us.

The divisiveness and challenges that Jesus puts forth in this passage seem severe. You might ask, "How do we find hope through such a challenge?"

How do we feel Hopeful through words that promise strife or words that indicate that there must be a calamitous change?

We must remember to whom Jesus is speaking. Who are his listeners in the crowd?

They are the oppressed people of Israel who are ruled by a sham and shameful government. In the towns where they live, there are militias stationed in the streets. They are there to control a perceived threat (real or imagined). And while the individual military personnel may not wish to see anyone harmed, (think of the centurion who came to Jesus to heal his daughter). They are put into place to harass and control the people at will.

During Jesus' life and throughout his ministry, the rulers of Judea did not see the people of Israel as anything but a means to gaining more power. The government treated them as though they were lesser in God's eyes and the eyes of their ruling society. They were not protected unless it served the pleasure of those in power. They were not cared for or cherished. They could be rounded up at any time and for any reason. They could be jailed, deported, or killed.

So, if a man were to stand in the desert at the river Jordan and tell of the divine One who is to come, and to declare: "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him." (Matt 3).

Would you be filled with fear?

If you heard the man in the desert proclaim:

"I baptize you with<sup>1b</sup> water for repentance. But after me comes One who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with<sup>1a</sup> the Holy Spirit and Fire.

Would you be afraid? Or might you feel excited that salvation was on its way?

Then perhaps the words that Jesus speaks

"I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" might be interpreted as words of good news. Words that bring promise.

These words that we read as divisive are words of Hope. And with this message of Hope comes the promise of Change.

Jesus challenges the status quo that seeks to oppress the powerless, the status quo that allows the powerful to inflict harm on humanity solely to accumulate more power.

Jesus challenges the message that with power comes the right to determine human worth, morality, the correct religious beliefs, and who we are allowed to love.

All these things —power, forgiveness, and worth —are best determined by a loving God. The God of mercy and justice.

In the face of injustice, in the face of cruelty, God does indeed challenge us to embrace change. As people of faith, we remember that when God challenges us to change (and God always will), the challenge is proclaimed with Hope. In Hope there is God's healing, and in healing there is once again Joy. This is the way of God.

There is an interesting bit at the end of this passage where Jesus is talking with this crowd of listeners. Jesus is talking about Trust., Trust in God, in the Way of God.

This begins with his statement, "You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?" is an appeal for trust.

To his listeners, and to us, Jesus is saying, you interpret the signs of your earthly world and yet you refuse to read the signs of heaven, you refuse to interpret the presence and message of the Son of Man ---And to accept and act upon what God has in store for you. His statement, while critical, is a statement asking for Trust.

Today's scriptural message of division is not a prescription for worry. It is not a mandate for violence or intolerance. That is not the Jesus Way. We know that.

For people of faith, what we hear today is God's promise of a new and better day, and this is Good News indeed.

*Amen*