

Pentecost 10, August 18, 2019

(Lk 12:49-56; Heb 11:29-12:2; Jer 23:23-29; Ps 82)

Earlier you saw/This is my highly scientific weather barometer: In Spanish or German, the result is the same. By the simple means of checking your Eselbarometer, you can tell what the weather's like! If the tail's dry, the weather's nice. If it's wet, there's rain. If it moves, there's wind. If it's white, there's snow. If you can't see it, there's fog. And if it falls off, there's an earthquake. Pretty handy, huh?

The words of Jesus in today's gospel have a little more depth to them. **When you see a cloud in the west, you know it's going to rain. . . . When you see the south wind blowing, you know there'll be scorching heat.**

But then he sort of *turned* on the crowds: **You hypocrites! You speak right out about the weather, but you're blind as bats about your faith! Here I've been with you for three years, teaching and preaching and introducing you to the kingdom of God—the very kingdom God has chosen to *GIVE* you. And you don't understand the forecast. You're just not getting it.**

We've come a long way since Christmas, when the heavenly host sang, **Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth *peace* among those whom he favors!** And now here's Jesus himself, sort of mocking his followers: **Do you think I've come to bring *peace* to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather *division!***

Jesus talked about divisions between genders and generations within families. But if we look at all of holy history—the whole of scripture—we see that the major division has usually been between the ruling class and the “common people,” people like us to in comparison to our elected officials have little power.

The wealthy and powerful were generally careless about those who had little or nothing. On the other hand, those who were considered of no account, unworthy of notice, found in Jesus acceptance, compassion, and love. People like lepers; the lame and crippled; the blind, deaf and mute; the bleeding; the demon-possessed; even the dead—all were touched by the mercy of God.

And the love and healing of Jesus extended beyond the Jews, God's chosen race, to gentiles. The outreach of his ministry found expression in the writings of St. Paul: **There is neither Jew nor gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, circumcised nor uncircumcised, for all are one in Christ Jesus.**

The death Jesus died he died for all: Jews and gentiles, slave and free, those obedient to the law and those who opposed the law. Jesus died to lift up the cause of righteousness, of justice for all, of love for enemies, of prayer for those who persecute you.

The problem was, people weren't *responding* to that divine self-revelation! Jesus, God-in-the-flesh, was in their midst, and they failed to hear the urgency of his message. You can hear his frustration: **I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized (his *death*), and what stress I'm under until it's completed!**

Since chapter 9 of Luke's gospel, Jesus has been on his way to Jerusalem, *to his death*. His proclamation of the kingdom of God is becoming more urgent, day by day, chapter by chapter. He's running out of time, and now he's beginning to call people to account. He challenges his followers to make a choice, to take a stand *on the side of the kingdom of God*.

Today, in the 21st century, *we* are his disciples. We live in a broken world, and now is time for decision. Can we—*will we*—allow God-in-Christ to make a difference in our lives?

Saying *yes!* to Jesus may involve saying *no!* to a way of life that's comfortable and familiar. In fact, I submit that if a good portion of the world around us isn't *against* us, we're probably doing something wrong, as a church—the body of Christ—and as individuals.

Since the moment when the Christian Church was first recognized as a breakaway new religion, it has been opposed. Every early Christian was in danger of persecution, sometimes in danger of losing life itself. If today we faithfully bear witness to Christ, we, too, may become victims of misunderstanding and hostility. But if we hear Jesus calling us to follow in a counter-cultural way, can we afford to cling to our comfortable status quo's?

Like last week's readings from the Hebrew scriptures, today's Old Testament texts challenge us to look at the world around us. In Jeremiah, the Lord reminds us that he is Lord over *all* the world:

Am I only a God nearby, and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him? Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord.

God calls to task the prophets who are telling lies in his name. **Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. . . Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?**

There's that image of fire again. It's the same cleansing fire that a frustrated Jesus wished he could call down on all those who were ignoring the seriousness of his message about the kingdom.

Beware of leaders who tell lies, he says, and listen to my faithful prophets! (repeat last sentence)

The psalmist also judges those who think they're great: **How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.** – We hear the echo of last week's call to care for *the widow, the orphan, and the stranger in our midst*.

Psalm 82 ends with these words: **Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance.** *All the nations*: in Bible times, that meant “everyone who isn't one of *us*.”

Our reading from Hebrews reminds us of all who *lived* their faith despite the persecution: **Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. . . .**

Sisters and brothers in Christ, turn *your* eyes upon Jesus, and open your ears and your hearts to all the needy in our world. Strive for justice for those who are oppressed, especially the widows, the orphans, and the strangers in our midst. Remember how Jesus reached out to all who had need of him. Then go, and do likewise. Amen.