

Sermon for 14.8.16

Scripture: Isaiah 5.1-7; Ps 80.1-2, 8-19; Hebrews 11. 29-12.2.; Luke 12.49-59.

The readings today deliver a message full of hope and determination.

Although at first glance, I must say they don't give that impression.

The reading from Isaiah is the song of the unfruitful vine.

In metaphoric language Isaiah speaks about the provision of God to his beloved people Israel and their response to his provision.

The overall message is that God's expectations are not met by his people.

For, Isaiah writes, he expected justice from his people but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!

The psalm is a communal lament which prays for Israel's restoration.

The epistle gives a deep and sound meaning of the way of faith.

And the gospel is a little surprising because it is very different to what we are used to, however the message today is the overall message of Jesus mission and accordingly, I believe, it draws all the readings together.

I came to bring fire to the earth, Jesus proclaims,

and how I wish it was already kindled.

I have a baptism with which to be baptized,

and what stress I am under until it is completed!

Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?

No, I tell you, but rather division!

And just in case we can't grasp the meaning here about the division, we are given clarifying examples.

From now on five in one house hold will be divided,

Father against son, and son against father,

mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

It is a strong message and one that might confuse those of us who have seen Jesus only as a unifying influence or a meek and mild man who did good things.

So what is this Fire that he brings and what is this baptism he must endure.

What exactly are they and how will they tear families apart.

Now according to the biblical commentaries that I have read, the **fire** that he brings is the fire of purification. His message, his ministry is **to show**, indeed **to be** the face and the way of God in the world, and to call people to himself and into God's way.

His ministry is therefore to purify, to transform people, **and** to enable people to distinguish falseness from trueness or as one commentary writes, to distinguish **dross** from the **genuine** product.

Now as we can imagine, the consequences of such a ministry are bound to rock the boat – to cause disturbance and division. For some would accept his authority to bring his uncompromising message of purification, and others would challenge his authority on every front.

And of course this applies today just as it did when Jesus walked the earth.

The "Baptism" with which he is to be baptized, is not used here in reference to the ritual that we all know, but in the metaphorical sense of being overwhelmed by catastrophe. What he is to endure as he delivers his message, is the most extreme

degree of suffering, and it is a baptism, **an overwhelming catastrophic event** that he must endure to the end - for until he completes it, he is under great stress.

Now as we know, for you, for me and for the many, Jesus does complete it.

He goes on his journey to Jerusalem in obedience to God's Will, resolutely facing all opposition and completing his mission.

The outcomes for human kind are limitless. What is won and offered is oneness with God, which is salvation, redemption, reconciliation.

In keeping with the metaphoric language in Isaiah, God's expectations are met in the humanity of Jesus. The sin, the separateness of the world, or what has kept us distant from God and each other, is overcome by him.

And Jesus **rises** as the Christ **and his Spirit is with us.**

Now our hope lies totally in this reality. And as such, we are on a journey of purification –in which we learn to distinguish the dross from the genuine product.

His Spirit is with us and it guides us into all truth.

We are not to judge, but we are to discern – to read the signs on a personal level and a corporate one. For then we are better placed to work through whatever faces us and not let it drag on and bring us down or until every last penny is paid - to use the language of the gospel.

So we might well ask, what is it that keeps us resolutely on this journey? A journey that has a baptism that is full of troubles, give way and detour signs and u turns.

What keeps us going? Well it may be the promises of steadfast love, forgiveness and companionship or the promise of eternal life.

Yet overall, I believe, it is simply our faith.

For faith is the freedom to seek God's righteousness and God's kingdom knowing that our God has already given us all in Jesus Christ.

As people of faith we live by the powerful conviction as did the saints and martyrs who have gone before us – that the reality of the world lives in the promises of God in Christ and not by our voices or whims.

*Therefore, As St Paul tells us,
since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,
let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,
and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,
looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,
who for the sake of the joy that was set before him
endured the cross, disregarding its shame,
and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.*

The Lord be with you.

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