

Year C – 10th Sunday after Pentecost; Lectionary 20 – August 17, 2025

Pastor Megan Floyd

Jeremiah 23:23-29

Luke 12:49-56

Grace and peace to you from God, our Creator, and from Jesus Christ, who guides our feet in the way of true and costly peace. Amen.

So... this is a comforting gospel passage. The word of the Lord, everyone... Thanks be to God.

These words from Jesus we have read today *seem* so contrary to Zechariah's proclamation in the beginning of Luke, that Jesus will be the one "...to guide our feet in the way of peace." (Luke 1:79)...

They seem contrary to the words of comfort he offers his disciples... "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you..." (John 14:27)

Why then... why... does he say here that he does not come to bring peace... but rather, he comes to bring division and fire to the earth?

Why? ...what happened to Jesus as our good and loving shepherd? ...our strong vine... our bread of life?

I love that Jesus... but I suppose... Jesus also said he is the way... and the truth... and the life.

But following *The Way*... does not guarantee prosperity or health... following *The Way of Christ* does not ever guarantee that the path will be safe from outside harm.

But if you value *truth*... and *life*... then *the Way of Jesus* is worth the earthly cost... it is worth the pain that can come when those you love... choose not to join you in your discipleship...

...when they choose, rather, to cling to the systems of sin and oppression... to cling to hatred and bigotry... prejudice and violence...

When they choose to cling to the very systems that Jesus came to destroy.

Then yes... Jesus' words will cause division.

Just as the prophet Jeremiah proclaimed... "Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:29)

Do you trust the Lord, your God, to break what needs to be broken?

Do you trust the Lord, your God... to guide your feet in the way of costly peace?

Do you trust the Lord, your God... to break open your heart... and set your heart ablaze with the fire of the Holy Spirit?

Do you trust your Creator?

"I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already ablaze!" (Luke 12:49)

These... are challenging words... but the Good News of Jesus Christ *should* challenge us...

The Good News of Jesus Christ *should* provoke us to break down the walls of sin and shame that we cling to...

The Good News of Jesus Christ *must* break us open so that the dawn from on high will shine upon us... and love... true love... God's true life-giving love... can grow.

Jesus knew... that this Good News... was worth dying for... surely for us, it is worth the discomfort of being re-cast... re-molded... re-formed by God's love.

Have you ever watched an artist blow glass? ...whenever I have had the opportunity to witness this art, I am captivated.

It requires training, skill, and strength... an artist's eye for color, shape, and detail... and a willingness to work with materials that could destroy them... molten glass... and raging fire.

And yet, the artist knows that by pulling together all the broken pieces and subjecting them to the fire... and then by using the very breath from their own lungs... something new and beautiful will be made.

Still... nearly every time I have watched glass blowing, I have seen them also break the glass.

Sometimes on purpose because it wasn't working out like the artist intended... and sometimes it just happens. Sometimes, after hours of sweat and toil and love and care... the creation falls away and breaks.

And the artist, too, is shattered... but broken glass... is part of the art that is glass blowing. Broken pieces... are part of the process of creating.

Broken pieces are not the goal in glass blowing... they are a byproduct...

Just as division... is not Jesus's goal or purpose... but division will happen because of his mission.

Jesus' mission is to let the fires of God's justice burn... a refining fire that turns over our systems of sin and oppression... turns over our world, and upsets hierarchies we'd rather keep intact...

And for those who cling to and benefit from sinful systems... who cling to and benefit from inequality and exploitation... Jesus brings a hammer to break them into pieces.

But for those who are oppressed... hungry... exploited... victims of violence, discrimination, and abuse... Jesus brings a word of liberation and ...peace.

The *peace* that Jesus brings... is a life-changing peace... a truth-telling peace...

It is a peace that breaks us open, so that we might be made new... refined by the fire of God's justice... and redeemed by God's love.

And... we are ALL called into this saving peace through our savior, Jesus. But make no mistake... this is not a passive or gentle peace.

It is not, in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "...a negative peace, which is the absence of tension..."

What Jesus calls us into is "...a positive peace, which is the presence of justice."

It's the kind of peace that comes when every mouth is fed... the kind of peace that comes when children are safe at school... the kind of peace that comes when tyrants are torn from their throne...

the kind of peace that comes when all of God's children, no matter their color or gender or identity, can live and grow and thrive, free from persecution.

Lord, "...let the fires of your justice burn... wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near..."

And he said... "I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already ablaze!" (Luke 12:49)

I said at the outset that these words *seem* contrary to Zechariah's proclamation in the beginning of Luke, that Jesus will be the one "...to guide our feet in the way of peace." (Luke 1:79)...

But ...we often forget to include the line before it... verse 78...

"By the tender mercy of our God... the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death ...to guide our feet in the way of peace." (Luke 1:78-79)

The dawn will break upon us to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Perhaps Jesus' words for us today... are not so contrary after all.

For God's word and God's promises come to us all... and it is joyfully good news to those who are oppressed...

And for those who prefer a negative peace... who prefer the mere appearance of peace while others suffer... then God's word is a refining fire...

But a refining fire can purify and make new... so indeed... Jesus' words are good news... if... if we are willing to be challenged.

Jesus' words are good news... if we are willing to be provoked... if we are willing to sit in the discomfort of knowing that we have contributed to systems built on sin.

But God's word can make us new... God's word can make ALL of us... new.

So trust the Lord, your God, to break what needs to be broken...

Trust the Lord, your God... to guide your feet in the way of costly peace...

Trust the Lord, your God... to break you open and set your heart ablaze with the fire of the Holy Spirit...

Trust your Creator... and know that real peace... the real peace that Jesus died for... is, for you... and it's worth living for.

So let our prayers, both spoken and in song, be honest and true...

Receive our prayers, O God, as we call out to you to break open our hearts... and bring us face to face with the fire of your justice.

And we give you thanks, O Creator God, for your promise to pick up the pieces of our broken selves... and re-mold us into something beautiful... something crafted to shine your love upon others.

We trust you, O God, we trust you with our lives.

Amen.

Written with gratitude for the theology and commentary of Debie Thomas. (2019)

MLK quote taken from "Letter from Birmingham Jail." (1963)