

**August 14, 2016 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
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**Jeremiah 23:23-29, Psalm 82,**  
**Hebrews 1:29-12:1, Luke 12:49-56**

References: DavidLose.net for 13c, this date.

**Let us pray:** May the words of my lips and the mediations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight...  
**Grace and peace to you, Beloved of God, from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

**A week or so ago, as I was anticipating this Sunday,** I had this idea that I'd write a "nice" sermon, maybe something interactive to get you moving around or talking, maybe something about the cloud of witnesses from Hebrews (I just love that beginning of chapter 12), maybe something easy, you know, light—it's the middle of August, we're watching the Olympics, and God knows there's a weightiness this summer 'round our cities and 'round the world.

That's what I was thinking: something nice, something easy, something light.

It was a good thought, don't you think?

And then, then I read this disturbing, confusing Gospel assigned for today from Luke's 12<sup>th</sup> chapter:

"Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!"

Then I couldn't just preach something "nice" without totally avoiding the seemingly not-so-nice from Luke, Then we have to wad into passages like today's: mother against daughter, and daughter against mother?

**In Jesus'** day, in Luke's time, those who followed the young Jesus-movement faced persecution of all sorts. Often it really was family member against family member.

David Lose writes, "To follow Jesus, you see, was to question the religious and economic and even political status quo...It meant accepting as the Messiah this itinerant rabbi who hung out with the dis-reputable, accepted sinners, and preached a message of love and forgiveness."

For those in the Jewish community, this Messiah looked nothing like the warrior King they expected.

For those who were gentile, this Messiah didn't fit culture's image of power, or authority. (Lose adapted)

You can imagine the tensions within a family as a daughter, let's say, begins to follow Jesus and his disciples, while her mother, or her folks, aren't persuaded and aren't so sure of what said daughter is doing.

"From now on," Jesus explains, stress in his voice, the cross near at hand, "Five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided." Not so nice, is it?

**Sometimes we hear Gospels** like today's, and we read them as intentions, as Jesus' intention to do these frightening things.

In our post-modern mindset and our progressive theology we're quick—maybe too quick—to tune them out.

I wonder, though, if Jesus isn't simply stating a consequence of following, a description of this life of faith? "Really," Jesus says, "If you're really going to follow, then there will be tensions, there might be divisions, you're going to have times—even at the big family dinner table—times that just don't seem so peaceful."

**We've all heard it**, maybe we've said it, "If you can't say something nice, then....don't say anything at all."

This straight-talking Jesus is cutting right through the Minnesota-nice.

There's going to be division, he says, deal with it;

move through the division, and only then, only there, will you get to a holy peace.

That favorite Dietrich Bonhoeffer image of cheap grace and costly grace could apply here.

This peace that Jesus promises isn't some "cheap peace", all nice talk, biting your tongue, avoiding the hard truth, staying where it's comfortable, doing the familiar: a peace where little is demanded.

No, rather, this peace is "costly peace", the kind of peace that will sometimes make our stomachs stew.

**I know that feeling:** something happens, something is said, something is done, something that runs in the face of this faith we share...and in that moment my stomach starts to churn and I must decide, do I let it just go past—that slur, that hate? Or do I respond, somehow respond?

And, if I respond, how? In what tone? From what role or authority?

We can let it pass—this too shall pass, and spare the tension in the room,

but sometimes, sometimes we are called to push back or explain another view,

or stand up to what simply isn't true,

and we do that with our power and privilege, or because so and so can hear it from us,

or even better: because to stay silent would belie our guts, our faith in Jesus Christ, our very call.

Now let me be clear, I'm not suggesting we club them over the head with our one-and-only truth.

But I am suggesting we find a way and words, stumbling as they may be, to express the grace we know.

There's an old German saying, translated something like: Truth without compassion is no longer truth.

Live your truth, dear ones, speak your truth, even in the face of division, but let us do it with humility.

**Goodness**, when I start to think about it, this scripture that I might have just glossed over, is so relevant.

I'm thinking of the woman of color daily facing the subtle and powerful cuts, jabs, silence, micro-

aggressions, they are called, and I'm thinking of the trauma she knows day after day, month by month.

I'm thinking of the young person finally finding the grace to accept that he is created in God's good image

and happens to love another man, and now he is sorting through the family tension this honesty evokes.

I'm thinking of parents and young adult children, each finding faith or not, in their own way, and the grace needed to love one another in our differences and to stay in relationship.

I'm thinking of our congregation and a whole array of theological and social issues, a few that we're clear on, and plenty more on which we may not see eye to eye, or at least about which we haven't had a good conversation or found the safety to discuss together.

Here in this congregation we have a history of what we've called Moral Discourse.

I wonder where and when we enter in?

I'm thinking of our nation, two years after Ferguson, and after the deaths of Michael, and Jamar and Alton and Phillando and, and, and police officers too ... the significant steps and the long road ahead.

"Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?" Jesus asks, "No, I tell you, but rather division."

Dear people of God, Where do **you** experience this division? Where do you experience the need for this costly peace? Take a moment to consider it?

**Once I dig in deeply**, I find a surprising freedom in this gospel passage, for it implies that our divisions, our hard conversations, are for the sake of what God is bringing into being.

We catch these glimpses of God's reign and our role—really our only role—is to keep-on-keeping-on, attending to not only the tensions far afield in, say, the Middle East, but to those at our dining room tables, our board room tables, our study tables, even our communion table.

For in these places, at these tables, we face the counter-cultural choice: settle for cheap peace, nice peace, or dare follow Christ to a costly peace that risks division and at its best invites God's holy reign.

**In all this**, I thank God for the cloud of witnesses that surrounds us, inspires and comforts, compels us.

Just think of the Olympic venues filled with these cheering witnesses, example after example of faith lived with creativity and honesty, even in the face of division, stumbling-yes, and rising again, always rising again.

Thanks be to God. Amen.