

SERMON**+ Lectionary 20 C (Pentecost 10)****August 17, 2025**

If you wanted to make a collection
of the hard sayings of Jesus,
I suspect this one might be
one of the first on the list.

But don't forget where Jesus is in Luke's story.
He has set his face to Jerusalem.

Jesus, the prophet, is headed to Jerusalem
to endure the fate of the prophets in Jerusalem.
It is his destiny.

And it's getting serious as he gets ever closer.
He confesses: "I have a baptism with which to be baptized,
and what constraint – what stress – I am under until it is completed."
The urgency and pressure he feels
to complete his destiny are so great.

He goes to Jerusalem to die, of course.
Jesus has come to fulfill his fate
that was declared about him since he first came.
And that fate is divisive.

Luke told us back in chapter two
how eight-day old Jesus
was brought to the temple by his parents
to be circumcised, named, and dedicated.
And there, a devout and righteous man named Simeon
met his family,
took baby Jesus in his arms,
and praised God.

But then he said this about him:

“This child is destined
for the falling and the rising of many in Israel,
and to be a sign that will be opposed
so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed.” (Lk 2:34-35)

Jesus was destined to set people against each other
from the beginning –
those who rose versus those who fell,
those who received the sign versus those who opposed the sign.

Still, we have good reason to think
that it was peace he came to bring.
After all, Zechariah had declared Jesus to be the one
“to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (1:79)
And at his birth, the angels sang,
“Glory to God in heaven... and peace on earth.” (2:14)

So, if it isn't a hard saying of Jesus,
it's at least a confusing saying to us.
Because Jesus DOES come to bring peace.

He sent seventy disciples out in pairs
to the villages ahead of him
to bring his peace.
“Peace to this house,”
he tells them to proclaim. (10:5,6)

And twice when he encountered a woman in need
he sent them away restored, healed, and forgiven
saying to both of them, “Your faith has saved you,
go in peace.” (7:50; 8:48)

So when he says to the crowd,
“Do you think that I have come to bring peace on earth?”
we all want to answer,
“Well... yes. We do.
Yes, we do think that you have come to bring peace.”

There once was a house
that sat on the very top of a hill
in the middle of a vast land.

The rain that fell on the east side of the house
ran down that side of the roof to a gutter
that emptied into a stream
that flowed out to the river
that took the water to the ocean.

The rain that fell on the west side of the house
came down that side of the roof to a gutter into a pond
that was drained by a brook
that led to a different river
that flowed out to a different ocean
on the opposite side of the land.

Jesus is like the peak of that house.
People will fall on one side of the roof or the other
when they obey his call to follow him, or not.
That is Jesus' urgent point here.

He has come to call people to follow him on his way.
To live and act according to the ways of the kingdom of God,
as he does, on his way to his destiny in Jerusalem.
Some hear and follow.
Some do not.
And that is the division –
sometimes even within families.

Jesus' word and way divide people
because Jesus' word and the kingdom way
are so radical, so important,
so urgent, so fundamental.

The ironic twist here is that

his word and way are so radical, important,
fundamental, and urgent
because Jesus is so focused
on bringing his peace.

Jesus does bring peace on earth.
And he sends us, his followers, in his peace
to share his peace with others.

But it is a radical, decisive,
and dividing word and kingdom way
that accomplishes that peace.

And that is what Jesus –
on his way to Jerusalem,
and feeling the pressure of the baptism before him –
is in the midst of doing
when he speaks this hard saying.

Jesus is in the midst of bringing
his radical word and kingdom way to its fulfillment
and bringing peace on earth
and peace to believers.

Jesus goes to the cross –
a decisive and dividing event if ever there was one –
to bring us his peace by deciding for us –
shifting the peak of decision from us to God –
and choosing to die for us and for our salvation,
for life and for peace,
and giving all these things to us as a gift.

But see, that is such a radical, important,
urgent, and fundamental thing
and so different from the ways of the world
that it causes problems for many, and divides people.
That kingdom way is not like the world's way.

So much of the world does not want peace
and the kingdom ways of mercy and forgiveness,
love and compassion.

Instead, division and power,
vengeance, violence, and self-centeredness
is how the world operates –
it's all around us and in every headline –
and that's why the kingdom way Jesus brings
is so divisive.

Jesus brings a word and a kingdom way
that is so radical, so important,
so urgent, so fundamental,
so upsetting to the world,
that it has and will set people against each other.
Even families.

But ultimately, the answer is yes.
In the end, finally,
yes he does come to bring peace to earth.

He comes to bring us
the peace of God's kingdom,
the peace of our salvation
and life in the resurrection from death,
the peace of reconciliation and forgiveness,
the peace of mercy and compassion for others,
the peace of his own presence
in word and sacrament and community,
the peace of communion with him
and unity with all his people in baptism.

He comes to guide our feet into the way of peace
and sets us on the path of life in the kingdom of God.