

**10<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost, Year C**  
**Jeremiah 23:23-29; Luke 12:49-56**  
**August 18, 2019**

We live in some trying times. There's no doubt about that. Whether it is politics, concerns about the climate, fear for the safety of schoolchildren, or even pop culture, it feels like there's more division than ever. That's of course, our limited view of the current times and the wider view of history and the world.

It does feel like our families are more fractured than ever. It does feel like our children are facing threats we never imagined 30 or 40 years ago. It does feel like who or what are the main teaching authorities in society have shifted drastically. Do we take our cues from whatever celebrity is in the news? Who or what defines "celebrity" (thanks, social media and reality TV!)

For many in our pews, they struggle to make sense of, let alone, keep up with our rapidly-changing culture and society, and the church's place in it. Right or wrong, they may search for stability by longing for a mythical nostalgic past. In doing so, they find themselves in conflict with younger members of their family as well as in the church. Why is Sunday School expected to never change? Why do parents allow their kids to play sports on Sunday mornings?

The Church's public voice is challenged. Not that this is new, but that challenge is taking on a different form than it has during past centuries. What does the Way of Jesus say about hunger and poverty? Should Christians make public witness on social issues and support advocacy efforts? What would Jesus do about the divergent voices from Christian leaders, who seem to be on complete opposite ends of the political spectrum? Who is right? It's confusing, sometimes noisy, and difficult to navigate. What is a faithful Christian to do?

Division is nothing new among God's people – as the prophet Jeremiah well knew. The life of the prophet was hard, as they acted as God's messengers, but often had to confront false messages from people claiming to speak for God, who only cause harm in the community. Who should the people believe? How to discern if someone is speaking for their own gain or faithfully pointing them to God?

Jesus doesn't really offer a clear answer, if we are searching for a literal solution to all of this division. His "I didn't come for y'all to pretend that there's a false peace happening. I didn't come so that you can ignore the tensions in the Church of the world. I came to *challenge* y'all to think and pray: what is the real message of God's reign?"

Sometimes, holding fast to the message of God's reign – a message of real peace and authentic freedom in Jesus Christ, of radical, outrageous hospitality to all people – *will* cause division. Not that we intend to cause strife. But it will be difficult for us to let go of the things that are anti-gospel.

It will be difficult to let go of our own ambitions. It will be difficult to let go of how church had been in the past, or to acknowledge how the church of the past has been harmful to people at times. That's hard to confess out loud, and harder to change. Changing how church "has always been" will upset those who feel that things were more comfortable in the past. Realizing that what was comfortable for some was not for many others. Working towards full and authentic welcome for all will cause some tension and strain. How do we keep what was good and embrace transformation?

What's the good news here? At first glance, it's hard to say. Jesus' words feel kind of harsh. But maybe it's this:

Jesus remains in dialogue with his followers, even when expressing frustration – at them, at the world, at our brokenness in general. Jesus never gave up on them. He continued to teach them, to try to open their ears, minds and hearts. He continue to love them, even when they failed to understand him.

More importantly, Jesus remained committed to the path on which he walked. Even though he knew that his path would lead him to false accusations against him, attempts at entrapment, betrayal, arrest, torture and execution, Jesus kept going. Even if he were the only one who understood that a cross was in his future, he remained faithful to God. For our sake, and for the sake of the world, Jesus kept going.

Humans will never be in complete agreement. Christians are humans, and struggle with this. Yet Jesus points us to his life as an example. More hopeful is knowing that Jesus remains faithful to us, in spite of our divisive selves. Thank God it is not our work to redeem the world, but God has given us Jesus Christ!

So we hang in there with each other as best as we can. Keep the dialogue open, even when we'd rather walk away. Practice hard, life-changing love and hospitality. Listen for where God is present and speaking. Look for signs that point to God at work. And keep our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, a life of authentic love.