

Jeremiah 23:23-29

Luke 12:49-56

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

“Rise up, O God, judge the earth;  
for all the nations belong to you.” AMEN!

What do you think would happen  
if a pollster went around a major city and  
asked the people there why Jesus  
came into the world?

What do you think their answer would be?

What is your answer?

Why did Jesus come into the world? (Pause)

I presume that none of us would say that Jesus  
came into the world to bring fire upon it and  
cause division in it.

And if someone were to answer  
the question that way,  
I think I'd assume they misunderstood  
the question.

In our reading today Jesus said,  
“I came to bring fire to the earth and  
division among people even  
members of family.”

Those who attend only Christmas and Easter  
don't know about this Jesus, but we know  
that Jesus won't pull any punches, or  
mince his words.

And we know how he offend responds to hypocrites.

A word in the text that means pretender or actor.

It's a word that Jesus used elsewhere in Luke  
when he spoke about religious people  
who play the part like an actor,

but misunderstand the heart of God and  
the spirit of God's law.

These particular "actors" are  
mentioned in Jeremiah, too.

There we heard laments from Jeremiah about  
the ways false prophets were  
leading people away from God and  
promoting a false peace or  
divine protection.

They say, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed,"  
in order to convey that they've received  
a divine vision but they lead people astray,  
cause people to forget God and

no longer recognize God's presence  
in their midst.

The dreams, they spoke of were rooted in  
the "good news" that all will be well, and  
that no calamity will come.

Those false promises provided people with  
comfort that resulted into complacency  
and idleness, even when society was going  
south.

And the false prophets rose in power during  
the complacency and idleness.

The false prophet proclaims, "peace, peace,"  
when there is no peace. (Pause)

In 1958, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
wrote about a conversation he had with  
an influential white citizen of Montgomery,  
Alabama, who asked why he and  
his associates had come to destroy

what he called the city's long tradition  
of "peaceful and harmonious race relations."

King replied, "Sir, you have never had  
real peace in Montgomery.

You have had a sort of negative peace in which  
the Negro too often accepted his state  
of subordination.

But this is not true peace.

True peace is not merely the absence of tension;  
it is the presence of justice.

The tension we see in Montgomery today is  
necessary tension that comes when  
the oppressed rise up and start to move  
forward toward a permanent,  
positive peace.”

The young Rev. Dr. King, Jr. then pondered,  
“this was what Jesus meant when he said,  
“I have not come to bring peace on earth,  
but fire and division.”

Jesus, in my opinion, did not mean  
tortuous flames that burn people, nor are  
his words about people being sent to hell.

Today’s gospel is not Jesus’ support  
for holy or unholy war.

As King wrote, “Jesus seems to have

been saying in substance:

I have come to bring this old negative peace  
with its deadening passivity to an end.

[To burn it down.]

I have come to lash against this [false] peace.

[Even if it create familial conflict.]

[Therefore] when I come, Jesus said,  
a conflict is precipitated between the [false]  
and the [true].

[A line is drawn]

I come, [therefore] Jesus said, to set division  
between injustice and justice.

It is for this positive peace,  
that Jesus brought, which always  
has the presence of justice, love and  
even the kingdom of God in our midst.

(Pause)

Now, we might come to see the way that  
Jesus was pastoral here.

Not like those who said follow me,  
do what I do, say what I say and everything  
will be easy or painless:  
that's what the false prophets say.

Jesus was honest about the costs that  
come to those who follow.

To love people, the way Jesus loves people,  
means to stand with the oppressed  
and marginalized.

To trust Jesus will sneak into the world and  
plunder it by dismantling unjust systems  
that have made the privileged comfortable.

This is the fire he brings, the cleansing fire  
that levels and razes the structures of  
white supremacy and injustice. (Pause)

What a gift these surprising words from Jesus are  
to the multitudes who have been suffering  
under the thumb of false/negative peace.

His words reveal to us an important (critical even)  
message about the way he saw himself and  
how he understood the purpose of his life.  
(Pause)

Now, if someone asked you why Jesus  
came into the world

your answer might be more like Jesus' words today,  
for we are surrounded by these  
negative kinds of peace. (Pause)

The words of the true prophet ring truth in our ears.

There is the negative peace spread  
in our nation by false prophets.

We too look and see clouds forming and  
know rain is coming.

We also feel the warm wind and thus know  
a scorching heat is on its way.

What signs are we seeing and what signs  
are we ignoring?

It's not only about Jesus not liking those we don't like.

If we are not experiencing conflict and  
encountering some division  
then we are part of  
the audience of complacency. (Pause)

So to close, we move into Hebrews,

to the familiar words of invoking the presence  
of the cloud of witnesses.

Invoking the presence of those gone before us.

We gather here and recall Pastor Emory,  
Ol' Bill, Edita, Woods and many others.

Spouses and family members of yours  
who gather to cheer us on and inspire  
us to follow Jesus into the hard places  
in order to set the world right.

Run with perseverance, (3X)  
but we do not run alone.

You're among family here and  
the ancestors cheer us onward. (Pause)

Ahead of us is Jesus, look to him.

Amen!