

## Sermon 18 August 2019

### Hebrews 111:29 – 12:2 and Luke 12:49-56

I have the best view in the house. You might think that facing the altar, you are facing the direction where everything will happen. But I can tell you that being given the great privilege of looking at all of you is the best view. In some respects the view I have is a reflection of what you think of me and what I'm saying

But the better part of the view that I have is that I can see the light in each of you. You are each of you extraordinary beings, full of light, full of wonder. You are fearfully and wonderfully made by a loving God. You are seen as being complete by Jesus, even if you feel that you are broken, excluded, unforgiveable or forgotten. Jesus looks at us, looking for the light in us, not for the small darkneses that we hide from each other. Jesus longs to make us whole, complete. God is relentless love. And his light shines in each of us. The collect for today, that Mark has just read, refers to the Holy Spirit being the 'life and light of God's church' and prays that we 'may bring forth the fruit of the spirit in love and joy and peace'. The prayer we will say at the end of communion, includes the words, 'we whom the spirit lights, give light to the world'. And learning to see the light of God in each other is part of a process of peace.

So why then does Jesus warn us that following him will bring conflict? Jesus will bring peace – really? Is that what we see 2,000 years later? Earlier in Luke's gospel Jesus has set out his agenda – reading from Isaiah he says:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.

That is not an agenda of comfort to the status quo.

It is a recipe for conflict, because it disturbs the status quo.

Indeed the immediate response his listeners had was to hustle him out of town and try to throw him over a cliff.

Jesus' agenda is one of healing and those who follow him are invited, expected, to be part of that. Peace will come through that.

Some of us will do so by befriending, others by works of social action, others by campaigning, others through prayer and all sorts of other ways.

Conflict comes alongside that healing agenda. We can learn how to embrace conflict, to make peace with it. We can learn not to run away from it, not to pretend it isn't there. We can learn that it takes persistence to restore broken relationships. We can expect to find God in the midst of conflict and that often conflict can be the place where we find God's wisdom and guidance.

We should not be afraid of conflict.

The heroes of faith listed in our reading from the letter to the Hebrews, having amazing stories of their response to God, in times and places of conflict. Many of them have barbaric and frightening outcomes. Interestingly most of those who are named were not perfect. They are included because they worked with God.

The letter then points to those of us who follow Jesus. This is my opportunity to bring Mark's toughmudder adventure into the sermon without it being gratuitous! The writer to the Hebrews says: we must run the race that lies in front of us. We must run it patiently, keeping our eyes upon Jesus. Think about how arduous was the path that Jesus chose, and know that the Holy Spirit accompanies us on our path as we seek to work through conflict, pain, and no doubt some pretty thick mud and ferocious obstacles. Tough mud, but lit by the Holy Spirit.

As we think now about the conflicts we face, personally, those of our friends and colleagues, those wider concerns we have about the way the wider world is responding to climate change, to political decisions that give rise to hatred, to division, to a gulf between those who have and those don't have. As we compare that to the agenda Jesus set, to proclaim release to the captives and so on. To bring healing.

May we reflect that Jesus' agenda means that

Love cannot affirm hatred.

Love cannot affirm racism

Love cannot affirm misogyny

Love cannot affirm lies

Love cannot affirm dehumanisation

Instead love seeks wholeness. Love seeks the light of the Holy Spirit that shines in each of us. We are each made for love – to give and receive it.

Jesus came to heal, knowing that his followers would have to work with the conflict that his agenda brings.

As we struggle with that, may we pray for each other and for our enemies, for peace bringing has to include them.

Where we are fearful, if our light is dim, may we ask to Jesus to bring us healing.

Jesus spoke about reading the signs of the times, that included recognising Jesus for who he is. The world still needs that today, may we be part of that.

Amen

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