

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 12:49-56

“Signs, Signs, Everywhere a Sign”

I can't help but being reminded by this Gospel of a song that came out in 1971. The song was by a band called The Five-Man Electrical Band. It was called 'Signs.' "It went "signs, signs, everywhere a sign." It was what we called in the day 'cool.' It was the image of a 'long haired hippie person that went into a church' and people somewhat rejected him. Signs are everywhere among us; whether it be 'yield', 'stop,' or 'Holiday Inn.' They are everywhere.

This Gospel also talks about being a disciple of Jesus Christ, and how it might possibly mean being misunderstood even by the members of your own family. Jesus' ministry would bring division because some people would accept what Jesus was saying and others would choose to reject it. Each of us have members of our family that have decided to go a different way. It is not uncommon but all we can do is love them – and that is what Jesus said. A true division would arise between those who decided to follow Him and those who refuse to acknowledge Him.

- Picture a devout Orthodox Jewish family who has a son or daughter announce that they have found Jesus, the Messiah. There would be a tremendous uproar in the family and that young person would probably be disowned and thrown out of the house.
- Now picture a Muslim family whose son or daughter announces the very same thing – that they have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Can you just imagine that this person would now become dead in the eyes of the rest of the family, shunned, and dare I say – something worse could happen.

Tolerance turns into intolerance, when this happens within their own family. Jesus' words in this Gospel reading echo the words from Micah 7:6 which predicts "*For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law-- a man's enemies are the members of his own household.*" Some of us live with that. If you choose to follow Jesus it is a matter of obeying the call – and it is non-negotiable – no matter what the cost!

Jesus' ministry would be like a consuming and purifying fire, a refiners fire. His life and death would be the basis for His judging Israel and that judgment, like fire, would purify the nation. Jesus spoke boldly about this in Matthew 10:34 when He said, "*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*" Jesus begins today's Holy Gospel with these words. "*I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!*" Jesus' use of the word "fire" here comes from the Old Testament of God's intention to purify His People by purging and destruction. Jesus is waiting for the time when God will kindle the fire with which Jesus sets certain parts of the earth ablaze. The verses that follow in today's Holy Gospel make it clear that Jesus is eagerly waiting, and anticipating the fulfillment of God's purposes.

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, August 18, 2019, Year C

Jesus awaits in anticipation the time which God the Father has set for Him to fulfill. Of course, in the end, Jesus will ultimately bring peace by His sacrifice on the cross. The point is that in expectation of the “end-times”- there will be a time of great distress – or tribulation.

The baptism Jesus spoke of referred to His death which He said would be coming soon. Jesus spoke about His impending death as baptism when He asked the Apostles: *“Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”* *“We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with.”* (Mark 10:38-39) After the Day of Pentecost, when the Apostles went out into the world with the Gospel, the Apostles would be martyred – offering and giving their lives for the sake of the church – drinking of the same cup.

Jesus could look forward to His baptism and to the “fire” that was to be kindled in the same way that a woman looks forward to having the child that she carried for nine months. The anticipation; every kick, just can’t wait for the day or night when that child would come into the world. Isn’t it true that she is eager to get on with it, not because it is pleasant and enjoyable, but because of what the end result would be? There are parents and grandparents, cousins, and aunts and uncles that have had the opportunity to hold a child in their arms. To have them with that innocent look stare up into your eyes. I just can’t help but thinking of when hold Judd, she lights up. There are others here today too – it is special. Jesus is referring to the “fire” of God’s wrath, first poured out on Jesus Christ on the cross as He carried all of our sins to completion, and then to be poured out on those who reject Him. There are some who will say ‘oh, God loves everybody, and that is true – but it is up to you to make the choice. Just listen to these words from John 3:18-19, when Jesus says, *“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”*

After Jesus had spoken directly to His disciples, then He turned His attention to the crowd, to the multitudes of people who surrounded and followed Him everywhere.

- Jesus taught the crowds that they needed to be sensitive enough to interpret the things they were seeing.
- Though they had been observing His ministry they were not able to see that He was truly the Messiah.
- Jesus told them that they, with no difficulty, could interpret natural signs but they could not understand spiritual signs. They could tell the change in the weather - it didn’t take a rocket scientist to stand on Mount Carmel and see the dark clouds coming from the west – because they were coming from the Mediterranean – and that would mean rain or to look and see olive leaves shimmering as the wind was coming from the south and knowing it is going to be hot tomorrow! A time of judgment was coming to Israel, but they would waste the opportunity for peace that God gave them. A light was shining right in from of them –in their midst, but they could not see Him.

- They needed to understand what was going on right in front of them. Jesus was offering the kingdom and they were not responding to His offer. The people had ignored or misunderstood the events which was bringing about the kingdom of God. They looked forward to the great and wonderful “day of the Lord” as the day of salvation, rejoicing, and blessing, but they forgot that along with the day of the Lord came judgment. This is what the prophet Amos reminded them: *"Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD, for what purpose will the day of the LORD be to you? It will be darkness and not light; as when a man flees from a lion and a bear meets him, or goes home, leans his hand against the wall and a snake bites him. Will not the day of the LORD be darkness instead of light, even gloom with no brightness in it?"* (Amos 5:18-20)."

The people failed to see the signs of the times – with the coming of the Messiah. People were seeking signs – but they were not seeing! It is interesting that the Greek word for sign is σημεῖον “*semeion*” which happens to also be the same Greek word for miracle. Even though the Son of God was standing right in their midst – they could not – or would not see Him. And John’s Gospel speaks of the signs that Jesus gave to them. *“Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn--and I would heal them." Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.”* (John 12:37-41)

The Apostle Paul wrote in his first letter to the people of Corinth about the mystery of God’s wisdom: *“a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”* (1 Corinthians 2:7-9) “

Jesus Christ came into the world – and if you will - disturbed the peace – or the “perceived” peace in the world – but even though unrecognized by many – His impact has reverberated through the past two thousand years, and it will continue until He comes again. Jesus urged the people of Israel, just as He urges the world today, to grasp the urgency of the present time and make a personal decision –the choice is up to each one of us - to do what is right – and to be reconciled to Almighty God – on His terms before it is too late!