

Jeremiah 23.23-29: Ps.82: Hebrews 11.29-12.2: Luke 12.49-56

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As we gathered we sang 'We have a gospel to proclaim, good news for all in all the earth'

And soon, we shall proclaim 'The peace of the Lord be with you all'.

Sandwiched in between the two stand our lections for this day – and a homily based upon them and built around them.

We have had some difficult readings this last couple of months and I have done my best to wring something out of them that resonates with the good news that the Prince of Peace brings to what he says, in what he does and, above all, in who he is.

Perhaps today's are the most challenging of all. I was tempted to say that I don't have a clue what Jesus is on about in all this and play a nice piece of music, but that wouldn't pass as a sermon. My responsibility and privilege is to open the scriptures, to make sense of them in the world we inhabit, to interpret the present time.

His words are withering, uncharacteristic of the Jesus we think we know. He admits he is under stress. We tend to dismiss the human Jesus, and see him as in complete control, cruising calmly towards calvary, but that is to deny his full humanity. It is not just that he is having a bad hair day.

We must hear him at his most agonised and find the truth in what he is saying. But he is not to bring peace? He brings fire and division.

The gospel, as we often say, lives in the middle of a broken and divided world and we pray for its healing. The same is true of our inner lives, where we struggle to live with our own brokenness. If the central message of Jesus' ministry, understood in the context of the journey of the whole people of God, is to restore what is broken, so bringing peace within the human heart and throughout God's whole creation, recognition, even acceptance of such brokenness is a critical step.

And, perhaps, division is what creates the brokenness. Jesus affirms this, not because he shuns any notion of peace but because he recognises that there is much evil in the world and in human activity.

And what troubles him to this point of anguish? It is the baptism 'with which I am to be baptised', as he puts it, in an unmissable reference to his crucifixion. He knows that it is a baptism of fire, a cleansing and purifying rite on behalf of the whole world, once and for all. It is, as we are reminded in Hebrews, a necessary step towards our perfection

He knows that only by taking such evil upon himself, as the scapegoat, the sacrificial lamb, can he destroy it from within. Well, we know that this salvific work continues, in us and between us, because we have not embraced the battle he enjoins. And division remains, brokenness is with us still.

We are very good at holding on to hurts, even to rightful, righteous anger, unable as we are, or perhaps more unwilling, to let things go, to give to God those hurts, obsessions, maybe because we like to hang on, for whatever reason, to those things that inflame us.

And let me here make a distinction between division and difference of view. Differences can be fertile ground for growth, renewal and reformation as long as we are able to debate and argue, not from a position of inflexible prejudice, as I said a couple of weeks ago, but from a deep desire to pursue truth. As Luke writes "why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

At his opening address to the recent Lambeth Conference, Archbishop Justin Welby said:

"We are deeply divided. That will not end soon. We are called by Christ himself both to truth and unity."

And later in the Conference, meeting the division head on, he deftly urged the house of bishops to embrace divergent views in a sense of unity. It is possible, he inferred, to live together within differences that do not divide, that do not tear us apart. That is unity in diversity.

The great division, of course, was, yet again, over the issue of human sexuality. Nothing new, we know. It worries me that this focus on one issue sets aside the great unity that exists in other areas. The same conference had found much common ground in matters such as world poverty, conflict, the climate crisis and other agendas in the salvation of creation, no less.

It concerns me that uninformed lookers on, seeking some insight into the work of the church as the people of God may conclude that the ONLY thing God cares about is people's sexuality. Yet this is the one thing that appears to cause such division as will lead to an existential threat.

A few years ago, it was the ordination of women. At this Lambeth gathering, a hundred of the bishops in attendance were female, a fivefold increase on the last time they met.

It takes time to listen and to hear in love and truth. It takes a sacrifice of the self and of our dearly-held, but immovable, feelings and beliefs. But it is what God wants of us, demands of us.

I recall once sitting in a Synod in Sydney, 650 members, and the intransigence of extreme parties and arguments was bogging us down.

One stood up and said. If two people, in bitter disagreement, stand back to back and walk away from each other, if they walk far enough, they will meet face to face.

Sometimes, we may need to walk far enough to put our own prejudices to the test. It is the same in our personal lives, and in our church life.

A word this week from Salman Rushdie:

Broad-mindedness is related to tolerance; open-mindedness is the sibling of peace.

I note that, a couple of weeks away, when we shall be gone and I shall not be here to berate you, this community of God in CC Lausanne is asked to gather and consider *together* the future of this chaplaincy and what is required to sustain it.

I urge you to engage in a spirit of openness, trust, love and unity. Be here. Bring your own ideas by all means but be prepared to hear, in that same spirit, what others have to say. And be willing to live out what might emerge from it and the subsequent work that will follow for all to undertake.

In our personal faith journey, in our local communities, across the globe, we cannot live sustainably if we are broken and divided, not even if we are uncommitted.

And, when we come to the Peace, let us do so prayerfully and openly. This greeting is more than a churchy 'howdy doody'. It is recognition that we can greet each other because we stand liberated, set free in God's grace. We acknowledge that nothing stands between us, nothing impedes the unity of life in the peace that God promises.

That is the pursuit of truth – and the truth shall set you free.