

10 Pentecost C

Jeremiah 23:23-29

Psalm 82

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

Luke 12:49-56

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Grace and peace to you.

Just to be clear about a couple of things:

1. The fires in British Columbia and Newfoundland are not a fulfillment of Jesus' words from Luke's gospel. Even though Luke reports Jesus saying he's come to bring fire to the earth, he's not set upon scorching creation to make a point or to grab our attention.
2. Secondly, I know some of you realize today is Ken and my 40th anniversary today – and let me just say – I didn't pick this gospel passage! It was the luck of the draw that the lectionary readings appointed for today speak of dividing families rather than 50 ways to grow a relationship.

Regardless of, or perhaps I should say *because of*, fires burning and families divided, Jesus demonstrates that he is passionate about us. There is no time to sit around or be complacent. He came to purposefully thrust us out of our norms by whatever means it will take.

Jesus knew love was hard. That's not something you see on a Hallmark card! We hope it will make us blush, feel safe, taste good, maybe it will even be good looking. Love is romantic and fits into a 2-hour movie script. Love is chocolate and cute notes or candles and wine. Interestingly, the Lutheran manual on the marriage liturgy doesn't speak of any of these things. Rather, it speaks about marriage being a *commitment*. That's why marriage vows speak of loving one another through sickness and health, through trials, ups and downs. When the unexpected comes we can't always be prepared for it, but if we're committed to weathering it – we've learned the depth of love.

Jesus knew love was hard, so when a rich young ruler comes in excitement to Jesus and is looking for praise and admiration, Jesus says, "well, you're going to have to sell everything you have before you can follow me." That's because Jesus wasn't looking for a groupie who could pay his way, but was hoping for someone who was ready to be wed to his ministry.

Or when Jesus asks Peter 3 times, "do you love me?" He wasn't hard of hearing, but pointing out to Peter that in the days ahead after Jesus died, Peter would be tested on that commitment over and over again.

God's love for us is passionate, wild, unexpected and committed far more than we can imagine. It is the foundation of peace.

“Do you think I have come to bring peace?” he calls. “Peace” had become a hollow word, a meaningless concept that people no longer trusted. The “peace” of the day was achieved by force, by rules, by oppression. It was guaranteed by Roman armies patrolling the streets and a sure set of laws and religious policies that controlled the masses, prevented uprising, squashed differences and demanded compliance.

To keep the peace the everyday person did their best to stay out of trouble, to keep clear of the feet of tramping horses and not offend the ruling powers. Whispers of discontent were kept behind closed doors and movements to bring about change were quelled by fear.

But peace cannot be founded on fear or compliance.

Jesus' work then was to love us enough to divide or dismantle the systems we cling to so real peace would have space to be. This brings us to another challenging part of this passage. We'd really sooner skip the part that speaks of Jesus bringing division. Usually, we hear messages of how Jesus brings unity, healing, restoring families and communities. Not so today.

Sometimes this passage is used as a “fire and brimstone” opportunity, but if peace isn't to be instilled by fear, why would Jesus contradict himself a breath later?

I had to look up the Greek word used in this passage to try to dig deeper. The same word is used in several different ways throughout Luke's Gospel. It's a word that means “pulling apart,” as when Jesus pulls apart bread at the last supper (Luke 22:17) or when the soldiers were about to pull apart his clothes when he died. It's possible here that Jesus is speaking here of pulling us apart from all that keeps us in pain, in hurt, in injustice, in power, in abuse, in apathy or anything else that we cling to instead of God. Jesus by his love and actions, pulled apart the systems that walled people in and held them captive – sometimes those systems can be the people closest to us or even ourselves. We all know we can be our own worst enemy. I still remember my mom telling me the old story called The Selfish Giant. You might remember it too, it speaks to the way that what we sometimes cling to actually keeps us

The Selfish Giant (summary)¹

¹ <https://www.toppr.com/guides/english/it-so-happened/the-selfish-giant-summary/>

The story starts with the children playing in the garden of the Giant every afternoon after coming from school. The garden was lovely, large, with soft grass, and fruit trees. The trees bore rich fruits and birds sang sweetly sitting on them.

One day after seven years the giant came back. The children were scared to see him. He saw the children playing and said that he would not allow anyone to play here as it was his own garden. He built a wall around it and also put a notice board. The notice board displayed a warning on it, 'Trespassers will be prosecuted'.

The children became sad as they had no other place to play. They would wander around the high walls of the garden and remember the beautiful garden inside them.

The spring season came and there were blossoms and little birds all around. But it was winter in the giant's garden and there were frost and snow. In the absence of children birds also did not sing. Once a flower bloomed out of the grass but after seeing the notice board, it also went back to sleep. Then came the North Wind and the hailstorm. Due to the giant's selfishness, autumn's golden fruits also did not come to his garden.

Then one morning, the giant heard sweet and lovely music. It was a linnet singing outside his window. The hail and the North Wind stopped and he could feel the spring. He saw that the children came into his garden through a little hole. The children were sitting on the branches of trees and the trees were blossoming. He also saw the birds flying and hear them chirping. The flowers had also come up. But, to his surprise, in one corner there was still winter. He saw that there a young boy was standing and he was not able to reach the branches of trees. The tree lowered its branches but still, he could not climb.

At this scene, his heart melted. He realized that he was really very selfish. He decided to put that boy on the top of the tree, pull down the walls, and allow children to play here forever.

Yes, friends, let us undertake the hard work of love for ourselves and one another. May we allow Jesus to divide from us what holds us back and may we always seek the beauty of peace founded on love. Amen.