

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost – 2022

Jeremiah 23:16-29

Hebrews 11:17-40; 12:1-3

Luke 12:49-56

Joshua gave it to them straight. It wasn't a "pep talk." It wasn't a long, involved argument. It wasn't an appeal to emotion. It was black and white. It was a time for choosing. Joshua knew where *he* stood. He was prepared to stand alone. They could do as they saw fit but the Israelites couldn't have it both ways. "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). Then Joshua gave them the options. The false, worthless gods of either Mesopotamia or Canaan or the Living Lord who had delivered them out of Egypt, preserving them in the desert with miraculous food, and brought them into the Promised Land. Joshua gave it to them straight. He let them know that their fate rested with their choice. He had made his. Nothing was going to deter Joshua from his path. "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

That priceless statement, that priceless verse has been plastered on everything that a Christian bookstore could sell. I suspect that Joshua has made the people at Selah Bookstore pretty wealthy. I am very tempted to buy a suitable plaque and hang it in my own home. The sentiment behind Joshua's confession is both resolute and sunny at the same time. When Joshua gave voice to his faith all of the Israelites fell in line. They said: "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods" (Joshua 24:16). They recounted the blessings they had received from the Almighty's hand which led to their insistence: "Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God" (Joshua 24:18).

Jesus tells you the flip side of this commitment. "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three" (Luke 12:51-52). I looked all over for a Christian bookstore that had engraved those words on a plaque to hang in my family room; couldn't find it. It's not a super pleasant thought, I guess, to those whose job it is to market Christianity. The Lord then enumerates all the ways this division will be manifested. Fathers against sons, mother against daughter and on and on it goes. This is not news to you who have any gray in your hair. Christianity is a dividing line. Christianity is *the* dividing line. Christ and His cross – you're either with Him or you are not. He wants you to know, Jesus wants you to know – division goes with the Christian territory. It does you no good, nor anyone else, to ignore it. What *would* do you good is to keep in mind why this is so.

You know that you are a child of God. You know that He created you, in love, and that you are holy. You came to this exalted status not by your own effort. You are a sinner. You have defiled God's will by living selfishly. Your thoughts and your actions are soiled by your own lust and greed and pettiness. You know that God is keenly aware of your life, your prodigal patterns and your faithless choices. You know that He is just and sin must be punished. You know that you would be "done for" except for one astounding reason – God sent His Son. Born under the law, the Son of God came to redeem you from the curse of the law (Galatians 4:4-5). Love for *you* prompted God to send His Son. Love for *you* prompted Jesus to lay down His life. You – He paid for *your* sin with His blood. You know He suffered. You know He gave all that

He has to give. For you; to make you His own; to save you from death; to give you more, to give you His life, more, more, more. Life in Him is more.

You know this because His Word has had its way with you. You are holy. His holiness runs through your soul. You have tasted His forgiveness, the forgiveness of your sins, and you know how wonderfully sweet it is. You cannot abandon Him. Your faith, breathed into you by the Holy Spirit, and His ongoing love will never allow you to abandon Him. You can't abandon the truth. You were washed, baptized in Christ's blood and made a new creation. You are holy. You can't abandon Christ's church. You can't abandon Christ's Word. You can't abandon His grace. Hope has laid hold of you and you know that this hope is real, eternal, refreshing to your soul. And the world *despises* what you believe. The world has no time, no interest in anything that calls its carnal lifestyle into question. The world is hostile to anything that reminds it of something more powerful than itself. Vain philosophy hates Christian wisdom. Pride hates humility. The darkness hates the light. Satan hates God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Division is not going away. How are we going to handle it? We will not be jerk-faces. We will not be "holier-than-thou." We will not be petty, sneering, smug, vindictive, or curt. That is not our way. But we must steel ourselves to our situation and prepare. Two lines I suggest that you learn: "I can't do that" and "you're not the boss of me." The world is going to make it harder for you to practice your faith. The world is going to attempt to make you say and support things that are false, ungodly. "I can't do that" is to be locked and loaded in your mouth. Satan wants to rob you of your faith and he will first attempt to put you in a corner of choosing something that violates your conscience or enduring persecution. If you capitulate then he'll put you in the same spot only with something larger at stake. "I can't do that." Be ready. The unbelieving world will tell you more and more what you can do and what you can't do in regard to your faith. The coercive power of the government may be brought to bear on you. We must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29). "You're not the boss of me" is a plain-spoken truth. Be ready to speak it. Be ready to live it. Division is growing. It is not a red vs. blue division at its core.

You can read the clouds. You make use of your ability to read the elements so that you can act productively in your environment. You're good at it. Rain, heat, chains for your tires (refusing to drive your FedEx truck in an ice storm) – you know how to plan, how to react to what you see. Can you read this present time? The Lord had visited His people. Some saw it. Some knew it. Some cast all their hopes, all their trust on Him. Some dismissed the Lord Christ with a lazy, superior wave of their hand. The miracles? To the unbelieving, Jesus was a mere showman or they thought that the crowds were drunk on their own thirst for a Messiah. Not much has changed. Jesus' resurrection is discounted. The veracity of eye-witnesses is casually laughed off by the sophisticated elite. Truth is hidden from their eyes.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday He wept over the city. "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes" (Luke 19:42). Jesus is peace (John 14:27). Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). At His birth the angels streamed from heaven to announce the benefit of His birth. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased" (Luke 2:14). On Easter, the risen Christ showed the disciples His wounds and said this: "Peace be with you" (John

20:19). Jesus didn't come to make peace with unbelief. Jesus came to make peace between you and Almighty God – perfect peace. Christ and His death and resurrection are the things that makes for peace.

The fire of God's wrath over sin was poured out on Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus came to endure that fire, that wrath. It had a destructive effect. The One who is the Life of the world died, pierced, and was laid in a tomb. In the Gospel reading, some time before it actually happened, Jesus was eager to have His sacrifice begin (Luke 12:49-50). He was ready. In the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, as Jesus is chained to the scourging post He looks to heaven and recites a psalm verse: "My heart is ready, O Father. My heart is ready" (Psalm 57:7). Jesus' distress on the cross was great. He would not abandon you. He will never abandon you. His atoning sacrifice is the sunrise that greets you every day. His glory in His suffering is the air that your soul breathes when you hear his Word. The joy of the resurrection is the smile in your heart when you are reminded that heaven is your home. That is the Lord we serve. That is the Lord who serves us.