



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, AUGUST 18, 2019  
JEREMIAH 23:23-29; PSALM 82; HEBREWS 11:29-12:2; LUKE 12:49-56

## WHOSE PEACE?



The first Christmas catalogue arrived at my house this week. It was full of kitschy ornaments and those cute little creches, you know, the ones that look nice under the Christmas tree but look nothing like what Mary, Joseph, and Jesus would have experienced in Bethlehem. Then there were the Christmas cards. There were hundreds of them! Most were predictable, the kind that wish future recipients a merry holiday and a joyous new year. But the cards that really looked out of place were the ones proclaiming peace. For the first time in a long time, I wondered how any real peace was possible. How could words on a card move

people in any kind of meaningful way? What kind of peace would people settle for? What kind of peace was God willing to settle for?

Jesus wondered about the same questions. Today's gospel is one of the hardest lessons in the Sunday lectionary. I still cringe when I hear this particular passage. Six years ago when I preached on it, I kept backing further and further away from the microphone. Apparently, I was so physically uncomfortable with this passage (and with the sermon) that I almost fell out of the pulpit. Many of you may be feeling some kind of dis-ease, too, and that's okay. This passage raises hard questions: why does our Lord, the

Prince of Peace, breathe fire, and what is a faithful response in light of his tirade?

When Jesus utters this missive, he is on his way to Jerusalem for the final time. His ministry and his life have taken a new, more serious turn. His fierceness is borne out of an urgency about God's mission and his desire for as many people as possible to participate alongside him with God. His fierceness is also borne out of the knowledge that sometimes, inspiration needs to be balanced with a heavy dose of realism.

In 1956, Autherine Lucy stepped foot for the first time as a student onto the University of Alabama campus. Lucy's first day of school was no ordinary occasion. Unlike every other student, Lucy was black, and unlike her fellow students, Lucy's welcome to campus was anything but smooth. During her first week, Lucy was egged. Bricks were thrown at her, and crosses were ignited on campus. When Lucy left campus one day, a mob surrounded her car and chased her away. A week later, the President and Board of Trustees asked Lucy not to return, citing an abundance of caution for her safety and for the University's. The next day, the Tuscaloosa newspaper reported that things in town were quiet, and there was a peace on campus.

When he learned about Lucy's situation, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said of the purported peace that, "it was a peace ... purchased at the

exorbitant price of an inept trustee board succumbing to the whims ... of a vicious mob. It was a peace ... purchased at the price of capitulating to the forces of darkness. ... This type of peace" King went on, "is obnoxious. It is the type of peace that stinks in the nostrils of the almighty God."<sup>1</sup>

That noxious peace is the kind of peace Jesus rails about this morning. It is not the kind of eternal peace that comes from God, but instead is a truce that masquerades around as peace but is designed to keep people stuck in place. God's peace is something else altogether. As King put it then, eternal "peace is not merely the absence of tension, but the presence of justice."<sup>2</sup>

God's peace is woven throughout the New Testament. Over 90 times, the Evangelists and Epistle writers pick up the threads of that eternal peace and call us to a deeper way of life grounded in justice, mercy, and love.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke, God whispers to Empire: "Let my people go. Let all people go. Let yourself go, too." Jesus hears the whisper of God and responds by showing people the way to freedom. It is the way to life, and that path is set before us each moment of every day. Like Moses, Jesus says, choose life, so you may live.<sup>3</sup>

The radical way of peace called for by the Gospel is no simple "one-and-done" task. It

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "When Peace Becomes Obnoxious," March 18, 1956, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/when-peace-becomes-obnoxious> (accessed August 17, 2019).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>See Deuteronomy 30:19b.

is an ongoing process that involves personal risk and a high likelihood of conflict.

When Jesus talks about division, he's really saying, if you are serious about following the Gospel, then you will have to make many hard choices. You will have to hold up the bright line of the Way of God alongside the messy lines of your life. You will have to decide what is out of alignment with the way of love. What is not working? What is hurting you and others? Then you will have to decide to do something about it.

That radical way of peace requires change. We can be consumed by that change and become like straw that feeds a fire. Or...we can be transformed by the change, made into something new by the refiners fire.

Jesus longs for us to choose transformation. God longs for us to choose the way of eternal peace. That way requires us to call out the stinky truces that keep people stuck in place. It requires us to honestly name the realities and the possibilities around us, and then participate in bringing about something better into being.

That kind of peace also invites deeper self awareness. That peace helps each of us discover that no matter what, we matter. Because of that peace, we learn to come home to ourselves to embrace the wounds and pains that await each of us there. Then, we can begin to enter into the trenches with someone else and be present with them in their own pain and loss. That's the kind of peace borne of God's unending mercy.

As many of you know, we did something new at Saint Mark's last week. For four nights, approximately 80 people came together to eat, play, and pray together. It was remarkable, and thanks to the vision of Kelly Moody and the commitment of so many in this community, this all-Cathedral summer camp was a great success.

While we had fun, we also did lots of serious work together. During the week, we unpacked this idea of God's mercy. Often, mercy is equated with pity. But mercy is about so much more. Like compassion, mercy also means showing up and being present with others in their pain. Mercy also has another aspect. It a way of life that says there is no other way to be in the world except to be with others. The Celts call this Anam Cara. Roughly translated, it means "soul friend." To be merciful is to recognize the interconnectedness of all beings. It means recognizing that we are all soul friends of each other, just as God is soul friend with us.

On the two front pillars, you will notice several banners. Every person who participated in EPL is a part of these. Hundreds of signs were created and then pieced together like a patchwork quilt. The banners are a kind of common prayer. They represent the collective hope that God's peace and mercy might permeate all of life. Those banners also reflect God's answer back to us: a glimpse of God's dream for us.

Look closely at the words on those banners. Those words are the way to life as God intends for us. Here is what they say:

Hear O Israel:  
The Lord your God is One.  
You shall love the Lord with all your heart,  
With all your soul, strength, and mind!  
And love your neighbor as yourself.  
There is no greater commandment.<sup>4</sup>

friends. Then go, and do them. Become the  
ones who put those words into practice.  
Become the ones who are merciful. That's  
how God's peace will take over this world.

Amen.

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That's how to practice the deep lasting peace  
God longs for. Put those words on your  
Christmas cards and proclaim them to your

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<sup>4</sup>See Mark 12:29-32.

**Luke 12:49-56** [*Jesus said, "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided:*

*father against son  
and son against father,  
mother against daughter  
and daughter against mother,  
mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law  
and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."*

*He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"*]



SAINT MARK'S  
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*Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!*