



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

CANON WENDY CLAIRE BARRIE, CANON FOR INTERGENERATIONAL MINISTRIES
THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, PROPER 15C, AUGUST 14, 2022
ISAIAH 5:1-7; PSALM 80:1-1,8-18; HEWBREWS 11:29-12:2; LUKE 12:49-56

There Are No Peaceful Prophets

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?"*

Stir up your strength, O Lord, and come to help us.

Does it feel like we are more divided now than we have been before? How do we interpret the present time?

The summer of 1965 was another time of great division in this country. During the first two weeks of August alone, there was a dramatic escalation in the number of American soldiers being sent to Vietnam, the Bureau of Labor Statistics announced that the rate of inflation had doubled since the summer before, the Voting Rights Act

banning racial discrimination in voting was signed into law, and the Watts Rebellion in Los Angeles resulted in the deaths of thirty-four Black Americans at the hands of the National Guard and the LAPD.

On August 14, 1965, twenty-nine people, most of whom were too young to vote, were arrested in Fort Deposit, Alabama, for picketing whites-only stores. A crowd of white people with rocks, bottles, and baseball bats faced them. All the protesters were arrested and carted off in a garbage truck to the jail in Hayneville, a facility without air conditioning, showers, or toilets. Five

juveniles were released the next day, but the other twenty-four were held for six days, as the authorities refused to release any of them until bail could be raised for all of them.

On August 20, they were released without transportation back to Fort Deposit. No one was waiting to pick them up, so it was clear that bail had not been posted. It felt like a set-up. They were ordered off the jail property, and while waiting for their rides, four of them went to buy cold drinks at a nearby store known to sell to Blacks and whites. Two were white men-- a Catholic priest and an Episcopal seminarian-- and two were young Black members of SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.



As they approached the store, the doorway was barred by a volunteer sheriff's deputy, Tom Coleman, who threatened them and pointed his shotgun at 17-year-old Ruby Sales. Jonathan Daniels, the 26-year-old seminarian, pushed her out of the way and took the full force of the blast. He was killed instantly. Tom Coleman then shot Richard Morrisroe, the Catholic priest, in the back, severely wounding him. Ruby Sales didn't speak for seven months. Coleman was

acquitted by a jury of twelve white men, who shook his hand when he left the courtroom. A year later, he said on national television that he'd shoot them again tomorrow.

It's clear from today's gospel that if maintaining the status quo is what's required for unity and peace, Jesus isn't interested. Neither was Jonathan Daniels. In March 1965, while studying for the priesthood in

Cambridge, Massachusetts, he saw the televised coverage of the brutal police attack on peaceful protesters as they tried to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, and the next day, he heard Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s plea for clergy and students to join them on

the march from Selma to the state courthouse in Montgomery. That night, at Evening Prayer, while singing these lines from Mary's song, *"He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent away empty,"* Jon said, "I knew then that I must go to Selma."

He meant to stay only for the weekend, but after missing the bus to return to seminary,

he and a friend decided to ask permission to stay in Selma and continue their studies remotely (though they didn't call it that then). He lived with a Black family, tutored children, registered voters, and attempted to integrate the local Episcopal church. In May, he returned to seminary to take his exams, and by July he was back in Selma to continue his civil rights work.

Jonathan Daniels is commemorated as a martyr by the Episcopal Church on the day of his arrest, August 14. Every year on August 15th, the Church commemorates Mary, the mother of Jesus. It's not a coincidence that Mary's song, the Magnificat, is among the lessons for both days, and it's not a contradiction that her revolutionary song of reversals, and the angels' song announcing Jesus's birth with "*peace on earth, good will to all*" is the same Gospel in which Jesus shouts, "*Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, I have come instead to bring division.*" When Simeon's song, recognizing the infant Jesus as the Messiah, ends, he tells Mary, "*This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your innermost being too.*"

Luke's Gospel isn't afraid to show us the pain and division of the world. How do we reconcile these songs, these messages? How do we go from division to unity? From heartbreak to joy? From death to life? Through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, as the presider will remind us in just a few minutes, when she breaks the bread and gathers us together.

Mary, Simeon, and Jesus are just three of the prophets that fill Luke's Gospel. According to New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson, the prophet, filled with and led by God's spirit, speaks God's words to the people, embodies God's word, enacts God's vision, and bears witness in the face of opposition. God's vision for humanity, as Luke shows us in the Gospel and its companion volume, the Book of Acts, is liberation and transformation. ¹Johnson says,

"The forgiveness of sins in Luke-Acts is neither a program of institutional reform nor a matter of private piety; it is the reformation of human politics that begins in the human heart and is expressed above all in an intentional community filled with and led by the Holy Spirit." ²

In my great cloud of witnesses, I remember Mary, and Jonathan Daniels, but today is also for remembering Ruby Sales. She regained her voice, and later attended Episcopal

Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, successor institution to the seminary Jon had attended. She is a human rights advocate and public theologian, and in 2016, another divisive year, she was interviewed by Krista Tippett on National Public Radio. She said,

“... love is not antithetical to being outraged. Let’s be very clear about that. And love is not antithetical to anger. There are two kinds of anger. There’s redemptive anger, and there’s non-

redemptive anger. And so redemptive anger is the anger... that moves you to transformation and human up-building. Non-redemptive anger is the anger that white supremacy roots itself in... I think that we have to... have a conversation that incorporates a vision of love with a vision of outrage.”³

May that be a prophetic word for us “in the present time.”

¹Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2011.2

² Johnson, p. 74-75.

³ Sales, Ruby, and Krista Tippett. “Ruby Sales — Where Does It Hurt?” The On Being Project. onbeing.org, September 15, 2016. <https://onbeing.org/programs/ruby-sales-where-does-it-hurt/>.



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