

**10 Pentecost  
August 18, 2019**

**In the name of God, who in Jesus,  
taught us the meaning of unconditional Love.  
AMEN**

**Sermon by The Rev. Deena M. Galantowicz**

Don't we all prefer the words of Jesus to be more soothing and comforting than what we just heard in today's Gospel? This is a challenge but, let's see what we can learn from it.

One thing of note is that this is one of the moments in our Lord's life when the HUMANITY of Jesus appears very clearly. Think of it...We all know the feeling when something we intend, or we attempt ...begins to show its true cost for us...in effort, in money...in some other sacrifice. We say yes to something and only later a fuller complexity of what is involved becomes apparent for us. Suddenly we begin to wonder what we were thinking to even have tried in the first place.// I think this is what is happening here. Listen to Jesus: He says, "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" When you think of it, we too know this feeling. We do not want something awful to happen, but at the same time we wish it would just all be over. Just get it over with. Soldiers tell of this...that there comes a point where you just want the battle to begin so you can get past it one way or another. On a smaller scale, it is like the speech rehearsed over and over again, where one is going to let the boss know that she is worth more money, knowing perfectly well that that confrontation may cost her her job...but, finally, we just want to get on with it.

Jesus says, "I have a Baptism with which to be baptized and what stress I am under until it is completed." Here, particularly, we encounter the humanity of Jesus. There is no attempt to hide what he is feeling...it is named.... STRESS! We know it well, this constant companion of contemporary life. But the Good News is that the next time any of us wants to say, "I am stressed out!" well, just think of it...evidently we are in Divine company. And that gives us an invitation to communicate with our Lord about our stress and about our frustrations. We all know that it certainly is true that the Christian religion has both unified AND divided. Since Constantine, it has formed the central value system of the western world. It has done wonderful things. //// But ..it has also done dreadful things, like the Crusades, killings, and genocide. Closer to home, divisions between conservative and liberal theologies, between evangelical and orthodox interpretations have ruined friendships and even split families, very much as Jesus said in today's Gospel.

And did you notice that the last part of the Gospel follows Jesus' practice of tying in what people know, with what they just don't seem to get. /// They know how to read the weather. They can see the signs of changing seasons, but, they are spiritually blind. They do not recognize the signs of a broken covenant relationship with God. The reason to read these words written so long ago is to listen again to what Jesus may be saying to us.

The theme here is the cost of building the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of our Lord's vision. Remember that it is in his presence that the Kingdom of God comes near. The greatest cost is to Jesus himself. And WE know that the cost will escalate to the horrible events in Jerusalem. For us

now, our Lord speaks of the cost of this vision of the Kingdom of God in personal and family relationships. Yes, there will be deep divisions in how the message of Jesus is understood. There will be deep divisions about him and all that he stands for... in marriages, in families, in communities. This has always been so. Jesus says, "Why do you not know how to interpret the present time?" Why do you continue your foolish ways? He offers a vision of society, and a way of personal life that can actually transform lives and bring that peace that passes all understanding;//// yet so few listen, so few respond...then and now.

Jesus then speaks of the cost of the vision of his kingdom in relationships: "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? // No, I tell you, but rather, division!" There will be deep divisions about his message. Then...and now. But the reality is ...He is the only one who can satisfy our yearning for wholeness; our need for a quietness within. As St. Augustine said, "Our souls are restless until they rest in thee."

To really get it about what new life means, about what Jesus keeps talking about, we need to recognize God's ability to overcome darkness. The Spirit of God sends the bright light of truth into the dark corners of our lives and roots out our fears, our anger, our pride. God wants wholeness for us. Jesus gives us some idea in today's gospel about what to expect from the purifying fire of the Spirit of God. Households, the central unit of society will be divided unless EVERYONE puts God first. We cannot love God with our whole selves AND preserve business as usual. When God rules our lives, the power of God will be within us. Seeking the Kingdom of God, building the Kingdom of God, truly trying to be Christ followers, Christians, means living our lives...all that we do...in a spirit of kindness and generosity in serving others in the name of the Lord.//// When you think of it, maybe THE message of Jesus is all about HUMILITY, about selflessness, about serving others and making their lives easier, all about doing the will of the Lord. Being his hands, his heart, his offering to others SELFLESSLY. This clearly is Jesus' desire for those who claim to follow him.

I'm pretty sure I shared this little vignette with you some other time when I was speaking about humility, but I think it is so apt to help make my point about humility. I remember many years ago now, being astounded to read a statement attributed to Frank Lloyd Wright. Here he was, this world-renowned architect with so many beautiful buildings to his credit. Yet, it seems that he once said, "Early in my life, I had to choose between honest arrogance and hypocritical humility. I chose honest arrogance and have seen no reason to change." How pathetic that he thought those were his only options. As talented as Frank Lloyd Wright was, he made a terrible decision. Surely to be in a right relationship with God, TRUE humility wins over honest arrogance and certainly over hypocritical humility every time. I suggest, there would be no choice in God's eyes between the gentle humility of St. Francis of Assisi and the arrogance of someone like Hitler. Compare the steadfast humility of Mother Teresa with the false pride of an ego centered politician...and think about the Kingdom of God.

Now, we must all understand that while humility is THE essential quality Jesus wants for us, this does not mean we are to be doormats or to overly focus on our unworthiness. Yes, of course, by our sins, by our wrong-doings, we are indeed unworthy of God's unfailing goodness to us; his unconditional Love for us. // That is probably why so many of us old time Episcopalians love our old familiar Prayer of Humble Access, found in our Rite One Holy Communion service, which says ..."We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table." But, we must also remember that Jesus told

us that we are to love our neighbors as we love OURSELVES. That means we are to have a healthy respect for ourselves...to learn to love ourselves, so that we then are able, //// in wholeness, /////// to love our neighbor. After all, we are made in the image of God. Think of it! That is certainly something we should treasure. We are made in the image of LOVE. Therefore, there is nothing un-Christian about having an appreciation for our lives, for ourselves. God loves us and we would be greatly off the mark if we felt we had no importance, no special value. We need to have respect for ourselves, our unique lives, our bodies and souls, our minds and our talents, AND our ability to serve and to love.///// So, what is the right perspective for us to have as Christians? //// I would say it is to have Humility... because there is no one among us who doesn't have much to be humble about.

Jesus taught humility and gave us many examples of it. /////// Therefore, with God's help, we should put down false pride and seek to be humble before the Lord.... Perhaps St. Paul says it best when he wrote to the church at Corinth: "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. For it is not those who commend THEMSELVES who are acclaimed". In other words, when we let our egos get out of hand, we need to step back and realize that every gift we have, every talent, every blessing, everything that makes life worth living, comes through God's love for us.

The Gospel we are considering this morning witnesses to the fact that the Kingdom of God is not easily achieved. But, in our Epistle today, the letter to the Hebrews, we are reminded that trials and suffering can actually help to produce the holiness of life that God wants for us. It speaks about faith by speaking of "a cloud of witnesses." I think not only of the people we have loved who have passed on, but all the people who surround us in a community of faith, in our friendships and in those we cherish. Obviously they do not have to be famous people. When you think of it, from the very beginning, from our very first breath, we inherit a country, a culture, a tradition. We inherit a family with all its complex characters, hopefully some of whom will be truly faithful people, witnesses to their love of the Lord and the difference truly following Jesus makes in all of life. Known and unknown, these people are a cloud of witnesses who help shape our lives... who we are and who we become. /////// And, when you think of it: How are we living so as to encourage others to be faithful? What will be OUR legacy?

It's an old metaphor, but, I like the image of the marathon, especially in the Olympics. The runners run in the streets for 26 and a half miles and on the last leg, as they enter the stadium, all of a sudden there are cheers from thousands of people. And every runner is cheered, not just the winner. We all have many cheering for us, so many supporting us on our journey, some who may not even know they have influenced us. They may be people we never met, people in books, or musicians and artists, people who have made our world a better place. AND WE may be one of those for another! The long-ago reading from Hebrews concludes by saying, "Let US also lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely, and let US run with perseverance the race that is set before US" because WE are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.

Just think of the joy we may know when we hear our Lord say to us, "Well done faithful servant. You have fought the good fight. You have kept the faith. Come. Inherit the KINGDOM Aprepared for you from the beginning."

May it be so for each of us. AMEN

