

# Sermon: Pentecost 10

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August 18, 2019

Year C

Jeremiah 23:23-29

Psalm 82

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

Luke 12:49-56

I want the kind Jesus back... the one who came to bring the peace which passes understanding... and not division... I want the nice Jesus back... not the one who came to bring fire and wishes it were already kindled... I want the loving Jesus back... not the one who came to set family members against each other... I want Jesus to use illuminated billboards to tell us what to do... so we don't have to interpret the signs of the times... because when we... as different as we all are... interpret the signs of the times... we can reach different conclusions... we can argue... we can fight... we can retreat back into our own corners... and when that happens... people say... *my denomination is right... or... my religion is right... or... my political party is right...*

And there is a public figure who identifies as Christian... who recently told other Christians... to be prepared to be shunned or ridiculed or discriminated against... for their faith... for defending the teachings of the Bible... but theological disagreement... is not... as they claimed... religious discrimination...

But which teachings do they mean... do they mean Leviticus 25:44... which says it's OK to possess slaves... both male and female... provided they are purchased from neighboring nations... do they mean Exodus 21:7... which says it's OK to sell your daughter into slavery... do they mean Leviticus 11:10... which says that shellfish are detestable... ceremonially unclean... and may not be eaten... do they mean Exodus 35:2... which says that those who work on the Sabbath should be put to death... and which day is the right Sabbath... is it Saturday or Sunday... for another couple weeks... I serve on both days... what about me...

In 1633... Fr. Vincenzo Firenzuola... appointed by Pope Urban VIII... began the Inquisition of physicist and astronomer Galileo Galilei... Galileo was ordered to turn himself in for holding the belief that the Earth revolves around the Sun... which was deemed heretical by the Catholic Church... in 1616 he had been forbidden from holding or defending his beliefs... but in the 1633 interrogation... Galileo denied that he “held” belief in the Copernican view... but continued to write about the issue and evidence... as a means of “discussion” rather than belief... the Church had just decided the idea that the Sun moved around the Earth was an absolute fact of scripture that could not be disputed or discussed... but theological disagreement... is not religious discrimination... and as we gain more insights... as we learn more about the mysteries of the universe... and the mysteries which make us human... it becomes increasingly difficult to argue that there’s really anyone... who’s OUT...

But the division we’re experiencing... is not a new thing... it’s been there all along... under the surface... bubbling up here and there... it has simply been... has recently been... more thoroughly exposed... and we must ask... from where does it arise... and whose agenda does it serve... because if the church is not political... it is irrelevant to the world that God so loves; though if the church becomes partisan... then it just becomes a tool of Empire... and the ensuing fear... keeps us from hearing the Holy Spirit...

You see... there are those who look at the social chaos we’re experiencing... and think that God is punishing us... that we’re too progressive... too permissive... too welcoming... that if we can just get the gays back in the closet... and convince women to be happy with the 79¢ for every dollar a man makes that we give them... and make sure people who... as they say in the south... are darker than comfort... and you know... who support sundown laws... people who express their racism on tee shirts that say... *Make the White House White Again*... that if we can do those things... then God will restore order and make us fruitful...

And then there are those... who look at the social chaos we're experiencing... and see it as an expression of increasing maturity... of growing up... of the birth pangs of new life... who believe that God is inviting us into more... that we're not as progressive... or permissive... or as welcoming as God would have us be... as God is... that's it's not enough that we've had one black President... that it's not enough for same-gender marriage to be the law of the land... they recognize that deep down inside every one of us... there is a yearning for the abundant life that Jesus came to give us... for us to have the freedom to figure things out for ourselves... that we don't all need to become the same... we just need to let God's light shine through us... and then... as Revelation 7:9 says... a great multitude from every nation... from all tribes and peoples and languages... will be robed in white and will stand before God with palm branches in their hands... palm branches... symbols of peace...

And peacemaking doesn't mean passivity... it is the act of interrupting injustice... without mirroring injustice... the act of disarming evil... without destroying the evildoer... the act of finding a third way... that is neither fight or flight... but the careful and arduous pursuit of engagement and reconciliation and justice... it is about a revolution of love that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressor free from all that binds us to Empire...

Jeremiah's lament is that false prophets trick God's people into forgetting God's name... just as their ancestors forgot God's name for false gods like Ba'al... and as St. Oscar Romero said... *Even when they call us mad... when they call us subversives and communists and all the epithets they put on us... we know we only preach the subversive witness of the Beatitudes... which have turned everything upside down...*

And the protests at Hong Kong's airport... the protests against ICE raids which demean people and separate families... the protests against racism... the protests against conversion therapy... the protests against the Flint water crisis... the protests against

human trafficking... and you likely know of others... all of these protests are against those who would limit the abundant life that Jesus brings...

Preaching professor Kenyatta Gilbert wrote that Jesus reminds the crowds that his coming was to bring not tranquility... but the judgment of injustice... Jesus' throat-clearing rebuke of "*You hypocrites!*"... heard by the crowd... beckons us to confront a truth many do not intend to accept as fact... that we live in a world that supports all kinds of holy growth... but also the growth of evil and suffering... born out of myriad forms of spiritual hypocrisy...

So we can either trust what Jesus told us... or we can reject it... we can either understand that the message of the Gospel is against Empire... or we can continue to look for ways to justify to ourselves why social justice goals are just pleasant pipe dreams... and we can try to convince ourselves that the federal budget is really not a moral document... and why we need to build walls instead of bridges... we can either understand The Magnificat as the upending of the world's kingdom in favor of God's Kingdom... or we can think it's just a nice poem... we can either acknowledge that the work we're called to do is difficult work... and accept that we won't solve all the problems in our lifetime... but it is what we are called to do... or we can excuse ourselves from doing it all together... we can embrace the false peace that the world can give... with it's excessive wealth... and private estates... and social privilege... or we can embrace hope... and work towards the peace which passes understanding... when everyone is fed and housed and healed and content and given every opportunity to grow into the people we were created to be... that's why Jesus wishes the fire was already kindled... because we really never stopped having the kind... nice... loving Jesus in the first place... he's just on fire for God's justice for us... and so let us... God help us... have the same passion for ourselves...

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