

## Not Peace but Division

Texts: Isaiah 5:1-7

Hebrews 11:29-12:2 (Series C. 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost) Ps. 80:1-2,8-19

Luke 12:49-56

### Prayer

For many of us, the boundaries of our love are narrow and very exclusive. Perhaps we love the members of our family to some degree, and maybe a few other people. Perhaps we talk about loving the poor and the lonely and the disadvantaged, but not with a great deal of conviction.

Loving our enemies is not we talk about. For many of us, it is like a huge paper clip around our life which prevents us from growing and expanding. Consequently, our life is closed to "*outsiders*," "*foreigners*," people who are "*different*." It is easier to categorize them than to love them. For some of us, the only area of growth in life is our "*Enemies List*."

But God, in His great Love, keeps on working on us. God wants to free us from this narrowness. God wants us to be free to live life in its fullness. And Jesus is telling us in today's Gospel Lesson that there can be *no peace on earth* and *no peace in our hearts* until those giant paper clips are removed.

The Old Testament story of Jonah is a classic case of a paper-clipped man. Jonah refused to proclaim God's love and mercy to the people in the City of Nineveh. Why? Because they were on Israel's "*Enemies List*."

They were "*outsiders*," "*foreigners*." Jonah's potential as a human being had been squeezed into a tightly drawn area. In the story, he represents a narrow and often vindictive nationalism. He represents a "*chosen people*" mentality which places limits on God's love and mercy.

The situation is the same in the New Testament. From the beginning, Jesus' disciples had this problem. When Jesus stopped to befriend the Samaritan woman, the disciples were outraged, and for two reasons.

*First* of all, it was improper to talk a strange woman. *Secondly*, she was not an Israelite. She was an *outsider*, a *foreigner*, one of the *enemy*. "Why in the world is Jesus wasting his time with her? She is not one of us."

But Jesus had come to change all that. Jesus had come to enlist them in a ministry of reconciliation. "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets,*" Jesus said. "*I have come not to abolish them, but to fulfill them*" (Mt. 5:17).

Jesus came to enrich our understanding of our relationships with God, our relationships with one another, and our relationships with all other people. And so we hear Him say, in the Sermon on the Mount, "*You have heard the commandment, 'You shall love your countryman but hate your enemy.'*"

My command to you is: love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove you are sons and daughters of your Heavenly Father" (Mt. 5:43-45). The late, great cellist, Pablo Casals, wrote an Oratorio based on the Nativity of Christ. He called it, simply, "***The Manger.***" When he was eighty-five-years-old he decided to travel on a personal peace crusade.

In his words, "*I decided to take the Oratorio any-where in the world that I could, and conduct it as a personal message of international understanding and peace. Since the message of this work was peace and the brotherhood of mankind, what better vehicle had I for acting at this urgent hour?*"

True to his word, and despite his advanced years, he gave performances of "***The Manger***" in North and South America, in England, France, Italy, Germany, Hungary, Israel and a dozen other lands, "Everywhere," he said, "people have demonstrated the same hunger for peace ...

Every performance has been for me a reaffirmation of my conviction that it is not the peoples of the world but artificial barriers imposed by their governments that hold them apart."<sup>1</sup>

In a message to a 1967 International Peace Conference in Geneva, he said, "We live in an Age in which humankind have accomplished magnificent things and made miraculous advances, an Age in which humankind embarks upon the exploration of the stars.

Yet, on our own planet we continue to act as barbarians. Like barbarians we fear our neighbors on this earth; we arm against them and they arm against us. The time has come when this must be halted if humanity is to survive. We must become accustomed to the fact that we are human beings. The love of one's country is a splendid thing. But why should love stop at the border?"

Jesus answers: Love should not stop at the border! "If you love those who love you, what merit is there in that? And if you greet your sisters and brothers only, what is so praise-worthy about that? Do not pagans do as much? In a word, we must be made perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt.5:46-48).

In Jesus' own words: "*I have come to bring fire on earth .... Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you division.*" (Lk.12:49-51) This sounds, kind of confusing.

At Christmas we sang joy to the world the Lord is come ..... he comes with peace on his wings and reconciliation between God and humanity. What is the meaning of all this? That I have come to bring fire on earth....and " Three against two and two against three, father against son and son against father etc.

I believe the problem is this book "the Bible." My reason is, society would have no problem at all, with *murder, sexual immorality, gossip, unforgiveness, hatred, cheating, witchcraft, jealousy, drunkenness, debauchery, envy, self-ambition etc.* We would have no problem at all, if the Bible hasn't set *the standard* for good moral behaviour.

Why is society so bent on throwing out the Bible out of public schools and public places? Is it because it reveals God's righteousness, which creates divisions? I believe it is God who sets the standard not you and I, and whenever you and I take a stand on the whole council of God, hell usually breaks loose.

In this piece from Luke's Gospel, Jesus seems unusually harsh when he tells us that he *came to bring fire to the earth* and *division* within households. Families, friends, nations are torn apart by mortals-who-would-be-gods. However, the *fire* of God and Jesus isn't intended to burn us to a crisp and turn the Earth into ashes.

This *fire* is the refiner's fire of *purifying* and *cleansing*, removing the scum, – the junk and rubble that weakens our faith. It is a call, a warning to us to re-order our priorities, our principles, what we value, our purpose in life.

This *fire* will hurt as we turn away from the temptations of all the false gold that flashes, but the reward is beyond all joy that we can imagine. This mortal life is not meant to be a "rat-race" to the finish. As that clock ticks on, we must now ask ourselves, again and again, what are we still trying to hide from that *Unseen Listener*?

*Am I a God nearby, says the LORD, and not a God far off? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name...Is not my word like fire. [Jeremiah 23:23, 25a, 29a]*

Therefore, we would have three against two, father against son, mother against daughter etc. The Gospel always divides. On the other hand, love also brings down the dividing wall.

The power of love is countless. We see no power in a drop of water. But let it get into a crack in the rock and be turned into ice, and it splits the rock; turned into steam, it drives pistons of the most powerful engines.

Something has happened to it which makes active and effective the power that is hidden in it. So, it is with love. Love is powerful. So long as it exists merely by itself, the power visible in it remains ineffective. The power of love is effective only

The story of our human life here on earth, up to and including the present moment, has been anything but peaceful.

As individuals, we rarely experience real peace of mind: so many pressures upon us, so many things pulling us in different directions. The word "peace" connotes wholeness and unity, but we feel fragmented.

In addition to that, ever since Cain became jealous of his brother and killed him as a means of resolving their differences, we've been doing the same thing. This tendency toward aggression and violence and hatred and hostility still plagues every one of us.

"Blest are the peacemakers, they shall be called the sons and daughters of God," Jesus promises us. In effect, Jesus is asking each one of us, "What kind of persons are we?" Are we the kind of persons who are contributing to the peace or are we the kind of persons who are contributing to the lack of peace?

We read the headlines and we feel the issues and we say, "What can I do about it?" Jesus is saying that each one of us can be a part of the solution. In our individual life situations, each of us has the opportunity to put the idea of reconciliation into action.

Our Christian hope is that the day will come when **"Peacefare"** will engulf the world like a mighty ocean. But unless each of us, in our own life situation, in our own little way begins to feed that ocean, drop-by-drop, our fondest hope for peace will accomplish nothing.

In a letter to God, a little girl wrote, *"Dear God, are you real? Some people don't believe it. If you are, you better do something quick -- (signed) Harriet Ann.*

*" Another wrote, "Dear God, my father is very smart. Maybe he could help you -- (signed) Margo." "Dear World, My Father is very smart. Maybe He could help you -- (signed) Jesus."*

**"My command to you is: love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are sons and daughters of your Heavenly Father ... In a word... Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong. And Love is the attribute of the peacemaker. Amen.**