

**2019-08-18 Sue Diggory**

**Trinity 9 – Hebrews 11 v 29 – 12 v 2 and Luke 12 v 49 – 56**

**‘Not peace but division’**

In the children’s book *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, four children enter a wardrobe and discover an enchanting world called Narnia. This magical world is filled with talking animals including a lion named Aslan, who rules over all of Narnia. The youngest child Lucy starts a conversation with Mr. Beaver, as she asks about Aslan, “is he quite safe?” to which Mr. Beaver replies, “Safe?...Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good.” Of course God isn’t safe, but God is good, and the same applies to his Son.

Today we have one of those Gospel passages that illustrate just what Mr Beaver was saying, one of those passages that as a preacher it would be good to just skip over, but that of course is one of the benefits of the lectionary, we can’t just take our scissors to the Bible and snip out the passages and pages that we would prefer not to hear, and today we have before us a Jesus who is far from ‘meek and mild’ we have a Jesus who has come *‘to bring fire to the earth [and] division rather than peace.’* And I suspect we are all much more comfortable with the image of Jesus as the meek and mild ‘Price of Peace’ rather than the eternal Judge of all, as one who brings fire and division.

This week we have no words of comfort, no ‘do not be afraid little flock’ rather we have words that will as always challenge us, but this time is in an unsettling way;

*‘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.’*

These words would have shocked and unsettled when they were uttered by Jesus 2,000 years, just as they still shock and unsettle today. In Jewish thought fire was a symbol of judgement and for them as God’s chosen people, judgement was for others, not for them, no simply being a Jew was sufficient to absolve them in God’s eyes so that when the Messiah came they believed they would be restored to their rightful place as God’s special ones, no wonder they

couldn't see who Jesus really was and didn't want to heed his message. The refining fire of judgement was not something that was on their agendas, and I suspect it is not on many people's agenda's in our increasingly secular society today.

This was no gentle Jesus meek and mild, no blue eyed blond haired Jesus wearing a white nighty figure, the one that we associate with so many Sunday school stories, and I suspect that for many of us just like the disciples this was quite a shock, no this Jesus was a very focused Jesus, no this was the Jesus who had come to bring in God's kingdom, the Son who had come to do the will of the Father, the Jesus who was preparing to face '*a baptism*' with which he was '*to be baptised.*' Not the sacrament that we undergo as we join the church today, but the '*baptism*' of the cross and the agony that would bring as the church would be ushered in with the completion of the Easter events with the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. This was the shadow which was now hanging over Jesus as he set his face towards Jerusalem.

Jesus was warning the people that there would be division, and making it clear that he would be the cause of it, that there would be those who followed him and those that didn't, that he would be the cause of division within the nation and even within families, because of the challenge he brings to each person, to each and every one of us has to choose, to choose his way, to walk his path or to choose our own way and our own path, the path that is the way of so much of the world, a world that today cries out for peace, but a world where so many are unable or unwilling to pay the price that peace costs, the price that Christ demands from all, even though he knows that at times we risk being very unpopular with our families, with our friends and with our neighbours.

This was of course being written in turbulent and unsettling times; the people were living under Roman rule and there were those who not only accepted this but those who benefitted by it, this was a time of division, and that is something that we are living with in our country today, we are living with division within our political system and within our nation, and division in what we as individual want as the next step for the future of our nation. I wonder what Jesus makes of some of the headlines we see in our newspapers, on twitter feeds, Face Book pages and other social media sites today.

Division is nothing new and I suggest that here as he speaks to the people Jesus is highlighting that sometimes division can be a good thing, it shows up difference, differences that need to be addressed and in this case what needs to be addressed is the path that the people were being asked to choose, to choose

his way and to be prepared to stand up for their faith and the things they believe in. I suggest in that respect nothing has changed in 2,000 years, this is the challenge our Gospel reading sets before us today.

But what is also being highlighted is that there is a cost, there is a cost that we must all pay if we are to follow his way, the way of the cross. If we take this path it may be hard and uncomfortable at times but I suggest we will begin to see that this Gospel passage is in fact not as harsh as it sounds on first hearing, it will in fact begin to bring comfort if we are prepared to be changed by the refining fire of Christ at work in our lives.

Let's turn for a moment to our New Testament reading and the letter to the Hebrews where we will find some words of encouragement, where we read that the Jewish Christians are being urged to draw on the faith of those who had trusted God, even if they hadn't seen the reality of all that was promised, those the writer refers to as the 'great cloud of witnesses' as an encouragement for them to *'run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.'*

May we too run the race, the race that will help us as we grapple with the 'signs of the times,' with 'fire and division,' with events that can make us anxious and fearful, with events that at times seems to be nearer to home than we would wish, may we too run the race, the race that will lead to peace, the peace of Christ in our hearts, but may we also remember the words of Mr Beaver that Jesus like Aslan isn't safe, but he is good.

Amen.

Let's pray

Living God,  
Reveal to us more of your will  
And equip us to honour it.  
Save us from taking the path of least resistance,  
Opting for peace where there is no peace  
Or pretending all is well when the reality is otherwise.  
Give us instead the faith and courage we need  
To stand up for what is right,  
Even if that risks alienating people,  
Including, perhaps, those we love.

Hear us and help us, O God,  
In the name of Christ.  
Amen.

*Nick Fawcett*