



Sermon

March 20, 2022

©2022 Captain Peter Lloyd

Gentle Fierceness

Luke 13:1-9

Gentle Jesus meek and mild is a good thing for children to know just as they are being put to bed for the night. It is true, but not the whole truth. It certainly won't do for an adult way of seeing Jesus.

Just a few verses before the reading this same Jesus says that He is not bringing peace but rather division. In some families that will be no more than mild surprise and the hope that the family member concerned won't go too overboard with this.

I remember being warned by a friend's Mother that I shouldn't take Christian things too far. "Just remember," she said, "that each of the Apostles was martyred." My favorite Aunt was warned by her local minister that some people had nervous breakdowns after their conversion.

Mild reactions to be sure when compared to what some of our brothers and sisters in Christ experience. At one International Conference of Church Army leaders, we were told that some of our colleagues here may not make it back home. They could well be killed or assaulted on their journey home. You will be well aware that we are told that there more people died for their Faith in the 20th Century than in the whole of the rest of the history of the Church.

Jesus brings division. Sometimes that division turns nasty, sometimes it is fatal. And there are all shades of meaning in between.

The Gospel readings for today underline this portrayal of Jesus. He says elsewhere that, "I am meek and lowly of heart, and I will bring rest for your soul." But it is the same Jesus who says in this passage, "I come to bring division."

That should not surprise us. There is not much that happens in this world that doesn't have at least two opinions about it. Vaccinate, not vaccinate. Masks no masks. The Government should have acted sooner. No, the Government has been right to be careful. Let's not be surprised at division, and especially let's not be surprised at it when it is caused by our Faith.

The context for today's Gospel goes back to the beginning of chapter 12. There we are told the crowd numbered many thousands and people were trampling over each other. So, Jesus begins to teach His disciples.

Our reading begins towards the end of that chapter with Him warning them to "read" the signs of the times. They know how to read the weather. Why don't they learn the same skill in reading what is going on around them?

Jesus has been in public ministry for nearly three years. It should be obvious for all to see that He and His teaching were causing division. The Jewish authorities are worried that He is not only leading the people astray but is also rocking the boat with the Romans. That is at least unwise and at most dangerous.

Above all Jesus is asking them to make their decision about Him, based on the evidence of His clear teachings and miraculous signs. He has claimed to be the Messiah. Can they see that in His words and actions?

For that is the ultimate divisive decision. Is He Lord of all? Did Jesus rise from the dead in bodily form or not. What is your decision about that?

Further, He knows what their current attitudes and actions will lead to. As with the Prophets of old Jesus is clearly stating that failure to do as God has decreed will have consequences for the Nation. Consequences brought on by the inevitable results of their behavior. He is warning the people of His day so that they can AVOID catastrophe. Jesus is in complete accord with the OT Prophets. Most of their message warned of disaster for Israel if they did not change their ways. This call to repentance is an act of LOVE. Love for His People. He knows what will happen if they don't change.

The contemporary history of Israel shows us why and challenges us just as deeply. There were groups of Israelite's who thought that the answer to Roman oppression lay in opposing Rome with force. All those attempts ended in disaster. Crucifixion was a common site in Israel. Rome will act against any threat to its power. Innocent people get hurt when that approach happens. No wonder Jesus says, "Unless you repent you will also perish." Go to war and everyone suffers. That is not the way Jesus would take and it would not be until after the Resurrection that the disciples will understand that.

There were some present who did not want to face those difficult decisions. They raise the question about two disasters where people had died and ask, "Were they greater sinners than others to have that happen to them?" Jesus' answer is unequivocal. "NO". Then He adds the stinger at the end, "But unless you repent you too will perish."

There are two interrelated things happening here. If the Nation of Israel continues with its current attitude and actions to the Romans, they will bring down a disaster on their own head. In addition, they are faced with deciding who Jesus is. On both counts they are urged to change their ways or face the consequences.

It would have brought Him no pleasure to know His predictions about the Nation came true in 70 AD.

Of the individuals that were present we have no way of knowing and are forbidden to guess. God alone is the Judge.

In this, please note the mercy that is extended to both the Nation and individuals.

The vineyard and fig tree have often been used in scripture to speak of Israel. This fig tree had not been doing at all well and the owner orders it to be cut down. But the gardener responsible for tending the grapes and figs suggests that the owner wait another year. He will give it special attention and if after another year it is still not bearing fruit then it should be removed.

You may not be ready to make that decision now. Only God knows your heart and He knows it better than you do. Will you then to the best of your ability seek after the living God? Will you invite Him by His Spirit to assist you in that exploration? Will you allow Him to nurture and encourage you? I have told you on other occasions, that I asked 20 men at a Men's Breakfast if they knew when they became a Christian. Of the 20 men there I was the only one who could point to a definite time. All of the others said that they could tell you when they were Not a Christian and that now they knew they were, but they could not identify a particular time when they decided.

The People of Israel were given another 37 years before their nation was destroyed.

For us then, the call to align our lives with the will and purpose of God comes in a similar way. Repentance is not something you do once and then forget it. It is a continual way of life. New ideas will come our way, new challenges will happen, new sins discovered. They will all need to be placed at the foot of the Cross and our lives adjusted accordingly.

What these passages tells us is two things.

1. God will be unremitting in His task to drive sin out of our lives. Please don't expect the Divine Surgeon to leave any vestige of the cancer called sin in your life. He cannot and must not FOR YOUR SAKE. His love for you is too great to leave it there.

2. Be assured that you will meet mercy and grace all the way in your journey with Him. It does not mean that mercy and Grace will be pleasant. It does mean that if there is pain God the Holy Spirit will not let it be there any longer than it must.

The God of Mercy and Justice can be trusted in all His dealings with us. Gentle Jesus may not be the whole truth. But is still truth nonetheless.