

Sermon for Sunday, August 14, 2022 – Provided at the request of the Reverend Richard Shields

Pentecost 10, Proper 15C, 8/14/22

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Jeremiah 23:23-29

Am I a God near by, says the LORD, and not a God far off?

Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the LORD.

I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed!"

How long? Will the hearts of the prophets ever turn back--those who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart?

They plan to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, just as their ancestors forgot my name for Baal.

Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the LORD.

Is not my word like fire, says the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?

Psalms 82

God stands in the council of heaven * and gives judgment in the midst of the gods: 2 "How long will you judge unjustly, * and show favor to the wicked? 3 Save the weak and the orphan; * defend the humble and needy; 4 Rescue the weak and the poor; * deliver them from the power of the wicked. 5 They do not know, neither do they understand; they go about in darkness; * all the foundations of the earth are shaken. 6 Now I say to you, 'You are gods, * and all of you children of the Most High; 7 Nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, * and fall like any ruler.' " 8 Arise, O God, and rule the earth, * for you shall take all nations for your own.

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days.

By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets--who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection.

Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented--of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us 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.

Luke 12:49-56

"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."

He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens.

And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens.

You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

For every person that walks through the doors of this church, each has a different reason for coming. Does that mean that no two people that come to church have anything in common? Well, no, it doesn't mean that. There is a lot of crossovers. It's a big mishmash of motives.

One person will tell me how coming to church is the one time in their week when they feel peace and contentment. They feel at one with the Creation, connected with their God and their neighbor, a great big Kumbaya experience.

Another person will tell me how coming to church they are looking to be challenged. What is the issue du jour? I want to walk away from church on Sunday knowing that I have engaged my moral compass, that I have been forced to decide where I stand on matters of importance. I want to invest my passion in things that will make a difference in the world around me.

Two different people honestly seeking two different worship experiences at the same church. Can it happen that way?

Jesus said, "Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!"

Oh Jesus, sorry to burst your bubble. You weren't the one to bring division to the earth. It has been here for a long long time. And it will continue to be here for a long long time to come.

Cue the prophet Jeremiah. There were prophets that prophesied lies, that prophesied the deceit of their own heart. They had their own agenda. God continually calls to them. The prophets are called to speak the word of God. Not to speak what they dream is the word of God.

“Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully.”

If you're going to put yourself out there as proclaiming the word of God, you have to be able to tell the difference between what is coming from your own devising, and what is coming from God. You have to be able to discern between preaching and living what only will satisfy the needs of your ego, and what comes to you from God for the loving and healing and forgiving of God's people.

And so it is out of our divisions, out of our diversity, out of our strengths and our weaknesses, that we find our respective calls to ministry. Like the prophets of Jeremiah's time, like the people of faith that the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews describes in today's Epistle, that great cloud of witnesses that surrounds us...it is in that cloud that you and I will meet today. We are here to listen with our minds and our hearts, with our na'au, to ask God what God wants of us. We are here to listen to our siblings, knowing, not just hoping, but KNOWING, that the Holy Spirit speaks through us and through our neighbor.

And so we will ask each other and ask ourselves three big questions today:

1. Who is St. Clement's? Whether you've been coming a long time, or you just walked through the doors, what and who is this parish 'ohana to you?
2. Who is God calling St. Clement's to be? What vision is God giving you to tell us where we are going as a parish?
3. What kind of priest will lead us from #1 to #2?

You each have the three questions in front of you and, hopefully, something with which you can write your answers. During the rest of the service, we will be praying for our own needs and those of others. We will be giving thanks for all the good things that God has given us, for all that God has made us to be. I ask you to think on these three questions and write down your answers, so when we meet after the service, we will be ready to go.

Let's say our prayers, and say mahalo to God, and let's get to work.

Amen.