

The Weather of the Kingdom of God

Proper 15, Year C, RCL. Luke 12:49-6. The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost. August 14, 2016. The Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Episcopal Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

When I was a scripturally illiterate young fellow, I used to read today's passage from Luke's gospel (Luke 12:49-56) and wonder what Jesus had against family relationships. Why did he use contention within households as a powerful image of the disagreement his message would cause? Was he influenced by the concern of his own family for the limb he was going out on by taking on the religious and political institutions of his day?

Maybe, but Jesus had bigger fish to fry than sorting out his personal relationships. In this passage he is referring to the sixth verse of the seventh chapter of the book of the prophet Micah, which reads as follows: "...for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; your enemies are members of your own household." Micah was issuing God's warning that dire times are coming and we had better trust God and not hope for ease or consolation elsewhere. In Jesus' preaching, that came

down to trusting Jesus' interpretation of the notion of the Messiah, the savior of the Jewish nation, long awaited and now present in Jesus himself. Jesus' message was that God's kingdom would mean a complete change of the religious focus of the world. This was unsettling to most of his listeners. Pretty much all Jews believed in Jesus' time that earthly institutions of government and worship would continue under the Messiah's lordship, though with certain important modifications, which mostly meant Jewish institutions coming out on top. But Jesus taught that all earthly systems of authority and belief would be utterly transformed by the direct presence of God: present at first in Jesus of Nazareth, born of Mary, crucified, risen and ascended to the right hand of the Father; now present by the gift of the Holy Spirit; eventually present in his risen and glorified form when the interpenetration of heaven and earth (at present only partial) has become complete.

It bothered Jesus immensely that most of his listeners (including his own disciples) did not get this, hence his impatience to get to the point where the Holy Spirit (the fire he mentions in the reading) could be spread upon the earth. He knows that to bring the world to that point he will be rejected as Messiah, and

he also knows the Jewish Temple and all the traditions and institutions that go with it—the collective life of God’s chosen people—will go through an awful cataclysm. This actually happened during the Jewish revolt against the Romans a few decades after his death. All this misery was going to befall the extended church family (so to speak) that Jesus had grown up in, and this broke his heart. He did not like having to quote Micah to get people’s attention and say, “Listen to me! You’re getting it wrong! It’s turning into a family fight when we should all be on the same page!” But Jesus’ listeners, or at least all but a very few of them, did not understand the spiritual weather of the times until after his death and resurrection.

Jesus is not anti-family. He is anti-complacency. He is anti-delay-and-avoidance. His challenge to read the signs of the times still stands. Do we, in our own day—two thousand years later—pay attention to the weather of the kingdom of God?

There is always work for God’s kingdom that urgently requires our involvement. We must be ready for it, paying attention to what’s going on in our time. Are there hungry people? Feed them! Turn a sign of

the times into a sign of the reality of the transforming power of the Spirit of the Living God. Feed people protein and carbohydrates *and* feed them the truth. That's what we'll do this Saturday at Trinity, Alliance, at the annual hot dog giveaway during the Carnation Day Parade—we'll feed people hot dogs, but it's also our way of saying, "In this church family we serve the truth about God, the universe and human destiny."

At the Holy Table of our Lord we Christians eat bread and wine, but we know that we are also being transformed by the Spirit of Truth. We understand life as sacramental: the feeding of the five thousand by Jesus, the feeding of passersby with hot dogs, the feeding of the community of believers with the body and blood of Jesus—these things all connect on the level of "on earth as it is in heaven". Earth and heaven are drawn together in Jesus, a communion that will one day be complete. Our calling now is to live in and on, by and for the love that feeds us and bids us feed the world in any and every good way, to the glory of God.

❖ This sermon is slightly modified from the sermon preached at the Shared Ministry parishes on August 15, 2010.