

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 23:23-29

Psalm 82

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

Luke 12:49-56

08/18/2019

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

[Jesus said:] ⁴⁹“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!

⁵⁰I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is

completed! ⁵¹Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you,

but rather division! ⁵²From now on five in one household will be divided, three against

two and two against three; ⁵³they 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.”

⁵⁴He 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. ⁵⁵And when you see the south

wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. ⁵⁶You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Let us Continue in Hope

Good morning! *“12:1 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, ²looking 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.”¹*

It’s these words that I cling to this morning. I love my job, but when I first thought about being a pastor the number one thing that made me afraid was the idea of writing a sermon every. single. week. How in the world would I come up with something to say?! I know I can talk a lot, but that’s pushing it even for me! It wasn’t pastoral care, or meetings, or any of the other many things a pastor does, but sermons made me wonder if it was even possible. I love delivering the sermon, but writing them down has always been challenging. It’s a lot like writing a paper for college or seminary... one that’s due every Sunday morning.

¹ Hebrews 12:1-2 NRSV

When I was in seminary we often heard in our preaching classes that we write the sermon that WE need to hear. That idea has stuck with me, I've probably even said it here a time or two. So when I looked at the gospel lesson for this week I sighed. With everything that's been happening in the world, I just didn't want these words from Jesus. I NEEDED something different, hope. Am I avoiding the text? Maybe, but I preached about it three years ago when this text last came up, so who knows. With my decision made, I turned to our reading from Hebrews.

I have a strange relationship with our book in the New Testament titled Hebrews. Sometimes I really enjoy it, other times I can go a significant amount of time without the book crossing my mind. But something about the text this past two weeks has just kept me coming back. The lesson is practically dripping with encouragement and hope for those who are tired or worn out. Then I read Dr. Mary Foskett's commentary. She writes: *"In today's reading, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews addresses a community needing to hear that it belongs. Seemingly having grown weary of the Christian life and perhaps worn by external pressure put upon the community, some were struggling with their faith and others were even neglecting to meet together (Hebrews 10:25). After previously enduring hardship and having shown great love for one another (6:10), the community had become, over time, less confident, less enthusiastic, and less cohesive (10:35)."*² If there is a world that can relate to these words, it's us. In the face of a world where evil can seem so strong, it's the witness of the faithful in Hebrews that reminds us as a popular Christian song writes, that our God is strong to save.

²https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4153

I get it, things are crazy sometimes. Heck, I thought nazism and fascism were things that we had decided in this country were wrong back in the 1940's, but they're rearing their heads again. Tensions with Iran are increasing and millions of protestors in Hong Kong are marching, some waving the flag of the United States of America.

So what does God say in the midst of our confusion and anxiety? God speaks through writers like those of Hebrews, reminding of us of the stories of our faith that have given us hope for all the ages: *“³²And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—³³who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They 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—³⁸of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. ³⁹Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.”³*

³ Hebrews 11:32-40 NRSV

And that something that God provided that was even better? Jesus Christ, *“the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”*⁴ Sometimes the world can seem overwhelming, impossibly insane. In those moments of uncertainty and doubt, we turn to Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine, who gives us the strength from God to withstand it all. When life feels like too much, we remember the faith of man in Galilee who stood up to an empire, who met death, and walked free on the other side. *“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...”*⁵ Amen.

⁴ Hebrews 12:2 NRSV

⁵ Hebrews 12:1 NRSV