

Tenth Sunday in Pentecost, August 17, 2025.

St. Michael's Church

The Rev. Joshua Wong

Gospel reading: Luke 12:49-56

Focus: What is peace from God?

Function: How does God offer us a deeper peace that results in wholeness and holiness?

*Let us pray:*

Merciful God, we thank you for the fire of your love that burns away what is false and draws us closer to you. We pray for the strength to stand firm in faith even when times are difficult. In your Son's Holy name we ask, Amen.

Today, peace is what many of us hope for. We live in a world filled with division, hate, misinformation and brokenness, we seek God's intervention and peace.

This morning, we came together for Centering Prayer to seek peace for ourselves and for the whole world. The practice of Centering prayer is a great tool for aligning our lives with God's vision of peace.

But today's Gospel passage may seem like the opposite—God wishing to bring disruption and condemnation. This passage can easily be misread in many moral and theological interpretations about God. But if we stay focused on the entirety of this passage, meaning before and after this passage, we discover that what Jesus is saying about peace is a new kind of peace, not our understanding of a temporary

source of peace. Jesus' peace is not a scripted superficial peace that is temporal, but one that results in a transformation for us to become whole and holy.

The Gospel according to Luke begins with the proclamation that Jesus will "guide our feet into the way of peace," and throughout Luke's Gospel, continues to reference peace. At Jesus's birth, an angelic choir sings, "Peace on earth!" On numerous occasions during his ministry, Jesus offers humanity words of peace: "Go in peace and sin no more." "Peace I leave with you." "My peace I give you." "I have told you these things, so that in me you might have peace."

Many of us, following Jesus's example, "share the peace" with each other every Sunday morning: "The peace of the Lord be always with you." "And also with you."

The vast majority of us believe that ours is a religion of peace, of peace-making, peace-loving, and peace-keeping.

And maybe some of us come to church because we want to find peace with God and receive peace from God? There is nothing wrong with understanding peace this way. But, in the context of today's scripture, before Jesus heads to Jerusalem to be crucified, he offers us a different kind of peace.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart! And the peace I give isn’t fragile like the peace the world gives. So don’t be troubled or afraid.”

Jesus wants to give us a lasting, deeper peace that isn’t fragile.

So, what do we make of Jesus’s startling words in this week’s Gospel? “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.

In the opening sayings of this lection, we catch a glimpse of Jesus’ frame of mind in the midst of his early ministry. He knew that, contrary to popular hopes about a messiah ushering in an era of peace and political independence for Judea, the aftermath of his own work would be division, strife, and fiery crisis.

Upon Jesus’ birth, Simeon prophesied that Jesus would be "a sign of contradiction.” In his lifetime, this division of which Jesus spoke was not antithetical to his realm, which is characterized by peace. Rather, the coming of the Kingdom requires decision and commitment, which can always be divisive. Jesus himself did not live a peaceful, problem free life. Just the opposite. Because

of his mission to bring the gospel to the world, He encountered rejection from his home town of Nazareth. His family tried to apprehend him as someone insane. His brothers didn't believe in him. The people of Capernaum ran him out of town. A Samaritan village wouldn't even let him enter their town. The religious elite "opposed him fiercely." Many of his disciples quit following him. And Rome executed him because people misinterpreted him and said that he told them not to pay their taxes.

So much for our perception of Jesus as “tender, meek and mild.” Instead, today’s Gospel compels us to move beyond a soft, saccharine Christianity, and wrestle with the hard, high costs of discipleship. The Gospel passage declares in honest terms what will happen if we dare to take our faith seriously. Why? Because life is difficult and our faith is fragile.

This week’s Gospel is a wake up call for what it means to be God’s disciples walking in faith. This week’s Epistle reading from Hebrews chapter eleven is often called the “Faith Hall of Fame,” since it highlights the remarkable lives and achievements of those who lived “by faith” in the Hebrew Bible. And indeed, the achievements of these faith-filled men and women are awe-inspiring. People like

David and Samuel and Rahab, Moses, Daniel and Joshua. These men and women conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, and escaped the edge of the sword, all because of their faith.

Yet, this passage said that their lives were far from easy and smooth. Many of God's faithful were tortured, flogged, mocked, and stoned to death. Many went about "destitute, persecuted, and tormented." Many spent their lives wandering in deserts and mountains, in caves and holes in the ground. And all of them — all of them— died without receiving what was promised to them.

And why were they still faithful? And what does this say about God?

Among other things, it says that God's timing doesn't always align with ours. It means that crises are part of being a human, regardless of whether we profess faith in a benevolent God or not. It means that we need to be clear and honest about the faith we profess. We are not immune to problems. The life of faith is also risky.

And the life of faith does not ever guarantee us health, wealth, prosperity, or safety. To suggest otherwise is to lie, and to make a mockery of the Gospel.

What does it say about God? That God is loving and fair to everyone. In Matthew, it says that “God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteousness.” This verse highlights God’s impartial provision and grace, extending blessings to everyone regardless of their righteousness.

And why did our ancestors of faith remain faithful? Paul, the writer of Hebrews, encourages us to persevere in the race of faith precisely because we are not alone. Jesus has pioneered the way of faith for us, and countless men and women have gone ahead of us through the millennia, shaping the path for us to follow. Their stories of hardship offer us both comfort and accountability and they testify to God’s faithfulness in ways none of them expected. These are some of the people on whose shoulders we stand here at St. Michael’s.

For myself, I know personally that my faith came from witnessing my parent's faithfulness to God, and how their lives testify to God's miracles and provisions.

I often forget about the "cloud of witnesses that have gone before me. Our culture aspires individualism, I'm quick to assume that I'm alone, and unseen in my spiritual life. But Christianity is not about me and my personal Jesus, doing our own private thing together. Ours is a profoundly communal faith, one that spans place, culture, race, ethnicity, and time. We live a christian existence with others in a community, loving and caring for each other. Take for example our Book of Common Prayer. Its intent is for a shared guide for worship.

When Jesus speaks of division rather than peace in Luke's Gospel, he's being descriptive, not prescriptive. It's not Jesus's desire or purpose to set people apart from each other but the opposite. The descriptive meaning is that Jesus will disrupt all dynamics in our relationships with ourselves and with each other that keep us from wholeness and holiness. This is the Holy Spirit's work—to challenge us to what or who is getting in the way of our wholeness as people of God.

Jesus will "guide our feet into the way of peace." And that peace will result in wholeness and holiness. But only if we allow him to work in us. How is Jesus disrupting your faith, and remaking you?

The baby Jesus was born to heal a world that needed true peace. Jesus did not come to preach an overly sweet message of irrelevance, but one that brings life and healing, wholeness and holiness into our lives so that we might have lasting peace. Jesus says, "Little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

"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."

So, what does your deeper peace with Jesus look like?

Amen.