

Tending and Preserving August 14, 2022, Psalm 80 and Luke 12:49-56

O Jesus, why are you showing up today talking about heat waves and fire, weather forecasts and division? Can't we rest a while on your shoulder, little flock that we are? Can't we take a summer break from troubling weather and division? Yes Jesus, in fact we do think that you came to the earth to comfort us and even blanket us, like children snuggling down for a summer nap.

Am I the only one who wants to say that to Jesus? I think not because even the Psalmist, who of course sang her/his song way before Jesus cried out sings today "Hear me O God for I am missing you! Heed the cry of my open heart."

Our truth Jesus is that we are not looking for open heart surgery. We are mainly looking for comfort.

But the thing is, if we are trying to gather round Jesus, we need to remember his mother who when she received her commission to bring him to life, was not comforted. Her very soul was pierced with the sword of knowledge that his birth and life would disrupt not only her status quo, but eternity.

Throughout the Gospels we hear that Jesus, loving his family and friends as much as he did (and that love is immense) turned first not to them but to Spirit. He told his disciples to leave their old lives, including their family and occupations and preoccupations in order to follow him to God.

Just as dark clouds signify rain, and wind from the south signifies scorching heat to come, fire in the Bible usually signifies the transformational presence of God.

Remember that Moses, minding his own business while shepherding his sheep, saw a blazing bush. Out of the blaze came the voice of God – or as the voice clarified – the voice of I Am.

On Pentecost when the frightened disciples huddle in the upper room, what lands on their heads? No reassuring pat on the head, but tongues of fire, signifying the presence of the Holy Spirit.

What about that peace, that lovely peace we do experience in the presence of Jesus? It turns out that this powerful peace is nothing that is familiar. It is, as Paul in his letter to the Philippians said, "The peace that surpasses understanding will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus."

When Jesus was walking on earth the Roman Empire was touting an Imperial Peace. It was called Pax (meaning peace) Romana. The peace of Rome that everyone could experience if they would just bow to the Empire, keep their mouths shut and do what they were told to do. As every autocrat has continued to demand over time.

By the time Luke was telling his good news about Jesus, some of the early Christians were saying, "This Jesus, the one who died on the cross, could not even save himself! How will he save us? Shouldn't we bow to Rome? He didn't make things better for us. In fact, by the looks of all the persecution we are experiencing, he made it worse."

What story did Luke pull forward to share with them? The one that Jesus' mother Mary already knew. The one that the first disciples, hypocrites as they were sometimes, already

knew. Jesus did not come to pacify. Jesus came to upset the powerful forces of evil that are in every time and place.

Jesus came to turn our minds and hearts and our very souls toward fire – the presence of God. Jesus came to help tend and preserve the constantly ravaged heart of humanity, not by soothing us but by burning away deceit and oppression. By lifting up the lowly. By restoring all of us, generation after generation, in the light, the fire, the presence of God.

As disturbing as the images we heard in the Gospel today are, know that the peace of God is beyond our understanding and yet it is not beyond our experience. The Christ, the Anointed One, will never pacify us. Jesus will never sing us lullabies to help us fall asleep and not see evil is nipping at our heels. Jesus says “Come to me all you who are weary for I will give you rest” so that we drop our fears about the future and put our faith and trust in his way – the Way that is the Truth with a capital T because there is nothing more powerful than that truth to shine a light into the world.

This is a good message for us in this time of change and transition when we would really like our future, both yours and mine, to be forecast clearly, as clearly as clouds often, but not always, forecast rain. Jesus is telling us the truth about ourselves today because we know pretty much how to interpret weather conditions, but we are shaky, as every church in transition gets shaky when it comes to seeing that spiritual fire is good for us.

This week I got a message from the retired Methodist pastor the Reverend Steven Garness Holmes. He was writing about this passage in Luke and also about this time in the world. It came in the form of a spiritual weather report. I am going to end my message with you today with this word from Steven and then with a blessing for us all. Steve called his message “The future is not coming.”

Dearly Beloved,
Grace and Peace to you.
The future is not coming.

We are the ones who are approaching the future.

The future is waiting patiently, full of hope that we are coming, because we are the ones who can heal it.

Weather Report

Impending, as a shifting front moves through the present, continually renewing it as the present.

High winds will continue; hold fast.

Expect high levels of both power and responsibility.

Regardless of how sensible we are, anticipate warmer temperatures.

Reverend Garness- Holmes and Luke and Jesus and the psalmist are telling us that our future is waiting and is full of hope, because we are coming. We are already being prepared to stand in the presence of God, even when the temperatures are physically and spiritually scorching, and take our direction from God. We are being called now to hold fast. To expect high levels of transformational power and responsibility. To trust that it is not only okay or tolerable that we are all getting shaken up, but that this shake up is already tending to us and restoring us in the light, the fire, the presence of God. What little flock could ask for more than that?

Dear friends, my prayer for all of us is that we stay the course with God, no matter how tumultuous the process. When we feel divided as we will, may we encourage each other to turn to look to the burning bush. May the peace that knows no understanding guard our hearts and minds in Christ, the light of the world, the Prince of Peace. Amen