

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

August 14, 2022  
The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:49-56  
Jeremiah 23:23-29  
Psalm 82  
Hebrews 11:29—12:2

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Let me sum up today's Gospel with one sentence...

*The greater peace will come at the cost of lesser peace.*<sup>1</sup>

When I read this statement I had to wrestle with its meaning. What is a greater or lesser peace?

One of the things I have been very interested in these days is how we cling to an easy Christian life. When we take the route of outwardly saying the right things but inwardly holding on to pain, anger, hurt, or shame. When we talk about loving our enemies but refuse to stick our necks out to actually create the outcomes we claim to uphold. When we make excuses and judge other people when we get too uncomfortable with the work of real reconciliation.

All of those things are what we might call lesser peace. We look like we are doing and saying the right things but we fail to act on them in any substantial transformative way. We talk the talk, but don't walk the walk.

Here's another way to think about lesser peace...when we ignore conflict and pretend that division doesn't exist. When a family builds unhealthy patterns that enable abuse and refuse to listen when someone speaks up. When we enable drug addiction or immoral behavior with friends or loved ones because we don't want to upset them with the truth of their actions. With each of these scenarios there is one commonality.

In each of them, we turn the other way in order to keep the peace but what we sacrifice over and over is wholeness and real faithful living.

That's lesser peace. Lesser peace tends to be the result of silence, ambivalence, fear...maybe self-protection or even self-denial. Sometimes it's the only choice we feel we can make for our safety or for the safety of others. But the peace Jesus is talking about in the Gospel means so much more than just getting along or putting on a good face or not rocking the boat. It means so much more than looking like you've got everything together.

Let me ask you to think about times when you have settled for lesser peace. It usually comes with a gnawing in your gut. You might say our soul knows when there is greater peace to be obtained and our soul knows when we have walked away too early, when we haven't done all that Jesus might be calling us to do.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/the-cost-of-true-peace-pentecost-10-c-august-14-2022/>

Here's the thing...Jesus doesn't want us to settle for lesser peace.

This is the heart of text from Luke. It's surely a hard text to hear at first reading. You might even find yourself scratching your head wondering why in the world Jesus would seem to suggest that division will be the result of following him? And not only division, but division within families....with the people you love. That doesn't feel like peace!

So, what does the division that Jesus describes mean for us and how does it relate to greater peace? Well, it means that when we truly follow Jesus we have to take a deep look at our hearts, at our motives, at our inner voice. And, sometimes, we aren't going to like what we find. We might uncover times we haven't been as courageous as our faith as called forth. We might find we haven't stood up for someone when they needed us. We might find we were in a really difficult place and didn't know where to turn for help.

But to take our faith seriously, to take Jesus seriously means that we are going to move into territory that will disrupt this lesser peace we have cultivated so carefully. It will upend parts of our lives. It will break open the wounds we have patched over but never fully healed. It will uncover the darker parts of ourselves that we have denied.

Because if you want the greater peace that Jesus desires for us, if you want to practice true discipleship then it will require our honesty, our courage, and our humility. When we do that, people will be uncomfortable...and, guess what, you will most likely be uncomfortable too. It's not easy work.

However, that discomfort doesn't mean that Jesus' intention is to divide families or communities or to create conflict. That's not the Gospel teaching. Writer Debie Thomas reminds us that *"the peace Jesus offers us is not the fake peace of denial, dishonesty, and harmful accommodation. His is a holistic, truth-telling, disinfecting peace."* (I love that phrase...a disinfecting peace).

She goes on to describe it as...

*"The kind of deep, life-changing peace that doesn't hesitate to break in order to mend, and cut in order to heal. Jesus will name realities we don't want named. He will upset hierarchies we'd rather keep intact. He will expose the lies we tell ourselves out of cowardice, laziness, or obstinacy. And he will disrupt all dynamics in our relationships with ourselves and with each other that keep us from wholeness and holiness. This is not because Jesus wants us to suffer. It's because he knows that real peace is worth fighting for."*<sup>2</sup>

That's greater peace. And, it's worth fighting for.

So, what would it look like to speak out and expose the lesser peace in your family or community or in your own life? The Rt. Rev. Frank Logue who wrote our opening statement on

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2305-disturbing-the-peace>

greater and lesser peace puts it this way, *“When you do so, [when you expose lesser peace] it may divide a household two against three....But if the Holy Spirit is speaking truth to your heart, the Spirit is leading you from a lesser peace to true and lasting peace. The cost will be high, so high that most of us shrink back and become lesser men and women....The gift of speaking the truth in love is not the division we fear, but the deep peace for which we long.”*

Speaking truth in love...to one another and to ourselves. It makes me wonder...can we trust God enough to seek greater peace? Can we risk being broken open?

It's a terrifying notion, especially if we have guarded our hearts and minds from loving, life-giving truth telling. Maybe you know exactly what that feels like. But our Christian faith reminds us that there will be obstacles, there will be pain, there will be times we will be afraid to love as boldly and courageously as Jesus did. Greater peace doesn't guarantee an easy path forward but it is how we are called to live. And it does bring about the good news that Jesus promises.

And that Good News of greater peace is freedom. Freedom from sin. Freedom from denial. Freedom from guilt. Freedom from shame. Freedom from fear. I want to encourage you to pray about the lesser peace that you are hanging on to. Maybe it's time to trust that God can break open your heart and mend what hurts. Trust God in your truth telling. Trust God in your healing. Seek greater peace.

Amen.