

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ - Associate Rector

Scripture: Luke 12:49-56

"Disturbing the Peace"

It has been said that Ludwig van Beethoven would sometimes play a trick on his "very polite" and staid audience – especially when he thought they weren't really interested in serious music. He would perform a slow movement on the piano; very gently so that the crowd would be lulled into thinking that the world was a soft, cozy place, filled with beautiful thoughts – almost to the point of drowsiness. Then, just when the final notes reverberating – he would crash his entire forearm on the keyboard – and laugh at the shock that he gave to everyone present. This was his cruel way of letting the world know that pain and beauty often lived along side each other – but that joy could come out of tragedy – as was evidenced in his own life. His "crash" which disturbed the peace of the haunting melody is a good image for what Jesus had to say in today's Gospel of Luke.

To be Jesus' disciple might mean being misunderstood even by the members of one's own family. Jesus' ministry would bring - not peace . . . but instead would be disturbing the peace and causing division because some would accept what Jesus was saying and others would reject it. A true division would arise between those who decided to follow Him and those who refuse to acknowledge Him.

- For example –a devout Orthodox Jewish family has a son or daughter come home and declare that they have found the Messiah – Yeshua. There would no doubt be an uproar in the family and chances are - that person would be asked to leave.
- Outside Judeo Christian circles – how about a Muslim family whose son or daughter announces the very same thing – that they have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. I venture to say that that person would now become dead in the eyes of the rest of the family, shunned, or possibly worse.

The tolerance that is demanded from others becomes intolerance, indeed, when within their own family. Jesus' words echo the words from Micah 7:6 which predict *"For son treats father contemptuously, Daughter rises up against her mother, Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own household."* Those who choose to follow Jesus must do so – no matter what the cost! Jesus had more to say about this subject in which His followers are called to love their enemies in spite of them. Jesus said *"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name."* (Matthew 10:21-22) (Mark 13:12)

Jesus' ministry would be like a fire which consumes, in fact Jesus longed for the purpose of His ministry to be accomplished. His life and death would be the basis for His judging Israel. That judgment, like fire, would purify the nation. Jesus spoke boldly to this end in Matthew 10:34 when He said *"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."* Jesus' use of the word "fire" here comes from a tradition in the Old Testament of God's intention of purifying of his People by purging and destruction. Jesus is waiting for the time when God will kindle the fire with which Jesus is to set certain parts of the earth ablaze. The verses that follow in today's Gospel make it clear that Jesus awaits with eager anticipation the fulfillment of God's purposes.

All the while Jesus is aware that it is He who is to spread a fire upon the earth and He, Himself, is destined to be overwhelmed by disaster, in fact He will be "immersed" in disaster. Jesus awaits in anticipation for the time which God, the Father has set for him to fulfill.

Of course, in the end, Jesus will bring peace. The point is that in expectation of the “end-times”- there will be a time of great distress – or tribulation.

The baptism Jesus spoke of most certainly referred to His death which He said would be coming soon. Jesus spoke about His impending death as baptism when He asked the Apostles: *“Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? They said to Him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized.”*

(Mark 10:38-39) It would turn out that in later years most of the apostles would be martyred – giving their lives for the sake of the church – drinking of the same cup.

Jesus could look forward to His baptism and to the “fire” that was to be kindled in the same way that a pregnant woman can look forward to her “labor.” Isn’t it true that she is eager to get on with it, not because it is pleasant and enjoyable, but because of what would be the end result? Jesus is referring to the “fire” of God’s wrath, first poured out on Jesus Christ on the cross as He carried all of our sins to completion, and then to be poured out on those who reject Him, and is that which will bring to pass the coming kingdom of God.

After Jesus had spoken directly to His disciples, He then turned His attention to the crowd, to the multitudes who surrounded Him.

- Jesus taught the crowds that they needed to be sensitive enough to interpret the things they were seeing.
- Though they had been observing His ministry they were not able to see that He was truly the Messiah.
- Jesus made the point that they, with no trouble, could interpret natural signs but they could not discern spiritual signs. They could tell the change in the weather - it didn’t take a rocket scientist to stand on Mount Carmel and see the dark clouds coming from the west – because they were coming from the Mediterranean – and that would mean rain or to look and see olive leaves shimmering as wind was coming from the south and knowing it is going to be hot tomorrow! As a matter of fact - today with satellites, radar, and telescopes we can predict storms and comets. With extraordinary technology we can put men on the moon, but not to see “the signs of the times.” Like people in the days of Noah, they have a false security based on ignorance. A time of judgment was coming to Israel, but they would waste the opportunity for peace that God gave them. A light was shining right in from of them – but they could not see.
- They needed to discern what was going on right in their midst, right in front of them – Jesus was offering the kingdom and they were not responding to His offer. The people had neglected or overlooked the sequence of events which was to bring about the kingdom of God. They looked forward to the “day of the Lord” as the day of salvation, rejoicing, and blessing, but they forgot that along with the day of the Lord came judgment. This is what the prophet Amos reminded them: *“Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD, for what purpose will the day of the LORD be to you? It will be darkness and not light; as when a man flees from a lion and a bear meets him, or goes home, leans his hand against the wall and a snake bites him. Will not the day of the LORD be darkness instead of light, even gloom with no brightness in it?”* (Amos 5:18-20).”

The people failed to see the signs of the times – with the coming of the Messiah. The Gospel of Matthew describes these events: *“The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. But He replied to them, “When it is evening,*

you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." And He left them and went away." (Matthew 16:1-4)

People were seeking signs – but they were not seeing! Now it is interesting that the Greek word for sign is σημεῖον “semeion” which is also the same Greek word for miracle. They were looking for supernatural evidence – “show me what you got Jesus!” Mark’s Gospel says “*The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Jesus, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation."* (Mark 8:11-12)

Even though the Son of God was standing right in their midst – they could not – or would not see Him. And John’s Gospel speaks of the signs that Jesus gave to them. “*But though Jesus had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?" For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, "HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM."* These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.” (John 12:37-41)

The Apostle Paul wrote in his first letter to the people of Corinth about the mystery of God’s wisdom: “*the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; (personal note: they still don’t understand!) for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."* (1 Corinthians 2:7-9)

Jesus Christ came into the world – and disturbed the peace – or the “perceived” peace in the world – but even though unrecognized by many – His impact has reverberated through the past two thousand years. I want to share with you an impression of that impact- which was written by Dr. James Allan Francis in 1925 and later appeared in a book he compiled, *The Real Jesus and Other Sermons*, published by Judson Press in 1926. It is simply called...

One Solitary Life

"He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village and worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for just three years He was an itinerant preacher."

"He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put His foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where He was born. He never did any of the things that we normally associate with greatness. He had no credentials but Himself."

"While he was still a young man the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves and His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth, and that was His coat. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend."

Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost - Proper 15, August 15, 2010, Year C

"Two thousand years have come and gone and today He is the central figure of the human race and the leader of the column of progress.

"All the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever sailed, and all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as has that one solitary life."

-- James Allen Francis

Jesus urged the people of Israel, just as He urges the world today, to grasp the urgency of the present time and make a personal decision – to do what is right – and to be reconciled to Almighty God – on His terms before it is too late!