

# Disciples make peace; disciples make justice

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Pentecost + 10 C – Jrm 23.23-29 Ps 82 Heb 11.29–12.2 Lk 12.49-59

We may need a bit of recovery time from our readings; particularly Jesus' strong words in the Gospel. So we'll come back to them in a minute. We need a way into them first, and for me, one way comes through yet another recent conference; Lambeth, the worldwide Anglican communion's ten-yearly bishops' conference. Abp Geoff recommended that we all listen to a keynote address by the Abp of York, Stephen Cottrell. I sent you a link to it in my weekly. <https://youtu.be/ZccZazNlnMI> Start at 31'24" It's a speech about mission and evangelism, and early on, he makes some very clear statements about our core mission as a church. He says, *The Church of Jesus Christ makes disciples. Not converts; disciples; followers of Jesus. And what do disciples make? **Disciples make peace, disciples make justice, and disciples make the kingdoms of this world the kingdom of our God and of his Christ.** We are not trying to build the earthly empire of an institution called the church. What we are about is this. **Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.***

*Disciples make peace; disciples make justice.* As we look around the world today, we shudder to see what happens to many of the people who work for peace and justice. If you do that kind of work, you invariably confront vested interests. Our readings today remind us that it was ever thus; that worldly power is often violent and remorseless in its defence of the status quo. And it's that type of power's opposition to missions of peace with justice which our readings describe today.

So in Jeremiah's oracle, God sees charlatan prophets trying to blind people to the truth, and Jeremiah is sent to confront them. Propaganda demonises its opponents with lies about them, and then uses its lies to justify their persecution. Jeremiah's persecution is graphically remembered in the reading from the letter to the Hebrews. We're no strangers to propaganda in our time. Right now there are bogus websites being registered by Australian parliamentarians. They intend to use them to peddle lies and foment division about the upcoming referendum to make sure it fails; bogus websites with names like *ulurustatement* and *voicetoparliament*. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-08-10/pauline-hanson-one-nation-may-lose-voice-referendum-websites/101317366>

Jeremiah reminds us that God sees this sort of thing quite clearly, and that when we see it happening, like him, we're called to speak out for justice so others see what's happening too. The Psalmist is quite clear that God sees this as a core element of our vocation – to see injustice and call it out; *judge for the poor and fatherless, it says, vindicate the afflicted and oppressed, rescue the poor and needy, and save them from the hands of the wicked* – rescue these dear ones from *walking about in darkness*. So as we see the gap between the haves and have-nots steadily widen, we're called to challenge that vigorously; to make sure others see what's happening too. Peace without justice is an illusion.

This is not to say we'll prevail in our lifetimes; but even so, it's what we're called to do – to see things the way God sees them, and to risk saying what we see. In our reading from the letter to the Hebrews after listing the successes of God's people early on, there's a turning point at v. 35 where things turn very ugly. There's a series of chilling descriptions of people suffering dreadful violence and isolation. That's what happened to God's prophets – like Jeremiah – and to many early Christians. The letter to the Hebrews tells us they didn't get to see what was promised, but as 'a great cloud of witnesses',

they watch over *our* continuation of *their* struggle. One sobering detail is that the Greek word for *witnesses* is *martyrs*.

So I think we're ready for the Gospel now. This shocking outburst from Jesus is one we instinctively read as prescriptive – as though he wants all those divisions to happen. But in the context of the journey we've walked with him since the end of June when we saw him turn his face to Jerusalem <sup>(9.51)</sup> – a journey where disciples and opponents alike have put him under a blowtorch; a journey to certain death – he's describing his own experience, and Luke is describing that of the early church.

*Jesus has not called his followers to validate the status quo [of haves and have nots]. His missional agenda of compassion, mercy, and justice shatters such a status quo. If we follow his call, there will be inevitable divisions and contentions.*<sup>[1]</sup>

So if we disciples are to make peace and justice, how do we do that? We probably won't be able to avoid opposition, division or contention. But even Jesus couldn't dodge that. So what do we do?

Abp Stephen Cottrell encouraged us to embrace evangelism – noting that the word Angel – messenger – lies at its heart. But he didn't mean hard-sell scalp-hunting evangelism; he meant something quite beautiful.

He remembered the best definition of evangelism he'd ever heard as *One beggar telling another beggar where they might find bread*. If we thought of our witnessing to what God has done for us in those terms, if we didn't get confused and imagine ourselves to be the baker; then our discipleship wouldn't resemble the status quo that such humility so powerfully challenges.

*Disciples make peace, disciples make justice, and disciples*

*make the kingdoms of this world the kingdom of our God and of his Christ.* We won't necessarily see that happen in our lifetimes, but we will be living witnesses to it in God's good time.

Amen.

<sup>[1]</sup> Carlson, Richard. P. (2010). Exegetical Perspective on Luke 12:49–56. In D. L. Bartlett & B. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year C* (Vol. 3, p. 363). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.