

9th After Trinity

Jeremiah 23:23-29 Psalm 80:9-end Hebrews 11:29-12.2

Luke 12: 49-56

In speaking and listening, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

As a drought is declared across our region with warnings of the danger of wildfire and we look out over the parched fields we pray with those who farm around us for the rain that will enable recovery of the land and the care of herds and flocks.

This week we will also mark the anniversary on the 15th and 16th of August of the flooding devastated our area 70 years ago, praying for those who lost their lives and those who were bereaved and giving thanks for the care and heroism of those who gave assistance and worked for the restoration of community life and security where it have been so disrupted, and perhaps for the skill of those who reduced the flood risk of the Lyn rivers with extensive engineering in the floods aftermath.

Against that background what are we going to make of Jesus' first words in today's gospel!

I have come to bring fire to the earth

I have a baptism with which to be baptised

Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No I tell you, but rather division.

If our answer is that we don't want to go through fire or water and we just crave peace, I suspect that is a similar reaction to most of those who were listening to Jesus.

What he goes on to ask them is how they interpret the signs of the times? If they have the skill to predict the weather from the clouds and the wind, he is saying, they might want to learn how to respond to what you see going on around them – for them that is the impact he is having in the world – for themselves.

In the verses that follow where our gospel stops he urges them to judge for themselves what is right: for example to settle their own disputes rather than handing them over to a magistrate.

He is calling them to account – to decide how they will respond to what he is revealing of God in the world and, he is doing so with the honesty that knows that his revelation of God's unconditional love, with its fire-like power will inspire the hearts of many who will carry it into the next two thousand years, but it will also meet the extreme resistance, that he himself will bear through death – the baptism with which he is to be baptised – to be able to rise again to reveal the ultimate life-giving power of God's love.

In the midst of this teaching he is reminding each one of them and us, that fundamentally we have the capacity and the responsibility to make our response to Jesus for ourselves and that this will not always place us in the majority of those amongst whom we live.

Our decision to respond to Jesus by turning towards the God of unconditional love, once made however, will guide us into a new response to the division Jesus is aware that this will cause.

The fire he wants to kindle is not a wildfire of destruction but the generative flame of love, his baptism is not a drowning but the emergence of the new creation from the waters. What he calls us to choose is life and love and that will transform our attitude to those from whom we might be divided, as his words of forgiveness from the cross model.

If it is choosing love that causes division hatred is disarmed.

In today's reading from Jeremiah the prophet tells us that God's word is like fire, like a hammer breaking rock. Jesus takes up this kind of image for himself, as the one who kindles hearts and shows us how to cleave what is of God from what is not. He shows us what the word of God is truly like when lived in human form: he is the word made flesh.

This week also marks a celebration within this Mission community: the feast of Mary, the mother of Jesus which in the church calendar falls on 15th August and we celebrate in Lynton today. She is the one in whom the Word of God first became flesh.

She is the one who shaped her response to by interpret her own present time, again and again

- Her yes to an angel of God telling her she would bring the revelation of God's love in person into the world
- Her yes to accepting the whole mission of her son as she stood at the foot of his cross
- Her yes to the birth of the church and the fire of the spirit, as she was at the heart of those who prayed in the upper room before Pentecost

She was perhaps the first of us to experience the pain of division that Jesus' revelation of the nature of God's love creates, to know the generative power of God's love at work in and through her, and to share in her heart the baptism of the cross Jesus speaks of in today's gospel.

In the reading that is set for tomorrow she sings for us of why she says yes to God, with all its consequences:

My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

⁴⁸ for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

Mary says yes to being one who reveals the love of God for the lowly and the poor, for each one of us not because of any status but because we are God's creatures.

Mary says yes to the Word of God made flesh – the God who as Jeremiah says fills heaven and earth but seeks to be known to us in person as the lowly, weak and poor one, the one who suffers with us.

In the vivid language of today's gospel Jesus encouraged those around him to respond for themselves with the same yes.

In a world of advanced weather forecasting can we interpret the present time with Jesus' vision?

Jesus encourages us to look at the signs of our own times and respond to him with the same yes –

Yes to the God whose unconditional love is for all creation

Yes to the God whose unconditional love for all creation is urgent

Yes to the God who calls us, like Mary to co-operate with God to bring that love to birth in the world.

By God's grace, may we be those who chose to say that yes, today and always. Amen