

Summerland United Church
August 17, Stepping Out: Step Forward

Prelude

Welcome and Territorial Acknowledgement

We Sing: VU 392 How Sacred In this Place

Threshold and Christ Candle

For the last six weeks we've been following some of the stories from Luke's gospel about Jesus and his ministry beyond the walls. We've heard stories about ministry, prayer and worship happening outside on walks along the road, in people's homes, during friendly and casual moments. By engaging with these stories, we've been invited to consider how we might 'be church, beyond the walls' how we might step out into the world and walk the same paths as Jesus did.

We end this series with a challenging passage about division and family and friends going against each other because of Jesus' words and teachings. But as we've learned from sharing the parables, we know that often we need to turn the wisdom of Jesus around and view it from another angle, and even shining a light into the shadowy discomfiting places in scripture helps them make sense. And help us to step forward in to our call here at Summerland United Church.

Opening Prayer, inspired by Psalm 80

Most Gracious God,
we greet you once again in this sacred space.

We have come because we need to be reminded of your love and your expectations for our living.

We are like the vine you planted, watered and protected.
We know in our hearts that we need, want and desire your presence in our lives.

So, we come in prayer and listen for your Word to speak to our hearts and reveal again your desires for us. Amen.

We Gather Together

Matthew 17:20

²⁰ He replied, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

We Sing: MV 27 Creator God, You Gave us Life

Scripture Reading: Luke 12:49-56

Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth, metaphor or story, listen for the meaning it has for you on this day.

⁴⁹ “I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already ablaze! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵² From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³ they will be divided:

father against son
and son against father,
mother against daughter
and daughter against mother,
mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law
and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

⁵⁴ He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain,’ and so it happens. ⁵⁵ And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. ⁵⁶ You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

Reader: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

All: Thanks be to God.

Reflection

No one really likes an angry Jesus do they? We really do prefer the compassionate and gentle Jesus. Perhaps we won't go so far to say we prefer “tender Jesus meek and mild”, but we don't like it when Jesus makes us uncomfortable.

Which the text this week does. This text invites – no compels us – to look straight into the face of Christianity which is not a face of a soft, dewy Jesus caressing a baby lamb. Rather it is the face of a burnt out, angry, righteously furious man reminding us of the hard and high costs of discipleship.

It's important to note, this passage is *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*. Descriptive refers to how things are. While prescriptive refers to things as they should be.

In being descriptive, Jesus is observing and reporting reality. Division already exists and will continue to exist, and the question he's asking is, *on what side of the division do you stand?*

It's not Jesus's desire or purpose to set fathers against sons or mothers against daughters. This is already happening. And it's certainly not his will that we stir up

conflict for conflict's sake, or use his words to justify violence or war. (which this passage has been used to do).

Rather he's commenting on what is already happening and his words declare in honest, unflinching terms what happens if we dare to take our faith seriously.

We all know families that have broken apart because of religious or political belief. Many of us have family members who support MAGA, are anti- 2sLGBTQIA+, anti-trans, anti-many other things. Many of us *try to keep the peace*, rather than step forward with our beliefs – and it is *this*, that Jesus is challenging.

During the time of Jesus, the Roman Empire emphasized *Pax Romana* – Roman Peace. Yet, this peace wasn't true peace. It may have embodied *one* of the signs of peace—the absence of war, but to preserve this peace many people and cultural groups were oppressed, kept from full cultural expression, forced to use a language that wasn't theirs, and prohibited from following some of their religious practices.

While it might look like peace, in much the same way deploying the national guard in Washington DC is meant to look like peace – it wasn't true peace.

Because true peace brings justice. To step forward into the type of peace Jesus is speaking about we'll likely anger the powers that be. Stepping forward to promote the wisdom of Jesus – equality for all, mercy, food for the hungry, shelter for the homeless, justice for the oppressed – will enrage Empire, will enrage Christendom (or more commonly known as Christian Nationalism in the USA). Those who have power and peace because of oppression aren't going to give it up easily.

Yet Christianity, the religion of The Christ, calls us to step forward into this fray and work towards, pray for, and embody a peace of justice and reconciliation, not retribution.

I used a couple of terms just not I want to define a little better. Christendom and Christianity. In the book *Staying Awake*, Christendom is defined as: appropriating Christian language and symbols for Empire's us.

Christianity is defined: following Jesus to establish God's new world.

Matthew 7:15 says, *watch out for false prophets. They come to you dressed like sheep, but inside they are vicious wolves.*

More often than not Christians in the news screaming about freedom convoys, and God hates these people or those people – are members of Christendom. They are using scripture for their own gain, not the betterment of the world.

And because they're loud and brash they get a lot of attention and that is who the world thinks Christians are. But that is not who we are and it is not what Jesus is calling us to

be. Jesus is calling us to step forward, in whatever ways we can, to call for true and just peace in this world.

This is the division Jesus is speaking about in the passage – it existed then, and it continues to exist now. This division that exists and requires those of us, committed to the message of Christ to step forward and speak his words. It requires us to be brave and to be confident in our faith, while also knowing that in stepping forward may cause further division.

In Luke 11:17 *Jesus says a house divided cannot stand*. Which seems to be contradicting here in chapter 12. But he's not, because what will be required to bring true peace and true justice to the world, will require the house – the institutions and socio-political structures that current run the world to fall – or, to be less dramatic – be reenvisioned and restructured.

We are in a unique position – we are congregation of committed and loving people. We have the privilege of being in a solid financial position and with good standing in our community to foster meaningful ministry in our town and beyond.

Jesus is calling us to step forward, out beyond the walls of the church and be a voice for the marginalized, to promote justice and peace, to bring comfort to those in need. To be Christians in this world – people with a compassionate urgency to change the world. May it be so.