

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

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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

What? Division not peace? I want to say But Jesus – what about those angels at your birth - didn't they say – peace on earth good will to all? This passage can be very difficult to deal with if you identify with Jesus as the Prince of Peace. This text can leave you rather shaken and confused!

Some of you will know what I mean when I tell you that I am a 9 on the enneagram. For those who don't know what I'm talking about. - very briefly – the enneagram is a system of nine personality types that help us understand ourselves and why we do what we do.

Each personality type has a number and I am a 9 – the description of a 9 is Peacemaker. Sounds lovely doesn't it. Who wouldn't want to be a peacemaker? And in many ways it is lovely– but one of the key characteristics of a 9 that we

have to deal with is that we hate conflict- and we will usually try to avoid conflict if at all possible. Conflict can make our stomachs queasy and our hearts beat faster- we can get very uncomfortable

I wonder if there were any 9s among the disciples. I wonder how they felt when they heard Jesus say this – I have come to bring division not peace? I don't imagine they felt comforted – especially since this division is not only between them and strangers but even within their own families - indeed they may have wanted to cry out - what happened to peace on earth? – but no doubt the 9s kept silent so as not to cause conflict with Jesus.

The disciples were no strangers to the conflict that often surrounded Jesus. They'd been with Jesus long enough to witness the division his work could cause. When he healed people some were amazed and drawn to him while others thought it the work of the devil or complained that he was breaking sabbath rules. When he ate with people some were pleased to be invited and others angered that he was breaking purity rules by associating with all the wrong people. Division and conflict seemed to follow Jesus wherever he went.

While the angels do proclaim peace on earth with Jesus' birth – if we look at the whole story in Luke's gospel we see that division and conflict are rooted in Luke's understanding of why Jesus came.

From before he was even born Mary proclaimed in her Magnificat that God in Jesus "...scattered the proud in their conceit, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

There's no way the proud and wealthy in this world were going to feel pleased with this agenda. The divisions are already being formed.

And then – when Jesus' parents brought him to be dedicated in the temple Simeon had said to Mary "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Even in the earliest chapters of Luke the stage is set for division, not peace.

And then at the very beginning of his public ministry –he stood up in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth and he read this from Isaiah – The Spirit of the

Lord is upon me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And then Jesus preached a sermon. All was going well – the crowd was so pleased with their hometown hero – until he suggested that some outside of Israel might find favor with the Lord over the Israelites themselves. Then the happy reunion took a big turn and this hometown crowd became so incensed that they tried to send him over a cliff! I've encountered some opposition to some of my sermons – but no one has tried to send me over a cliff, Yet.

Now Jesus' words in our gospel today are making more sense! Indeed Jesus came to turn the world upside down- to bring good news to the least the lonely the lost – and that is can be heard as bad news for the mighty the powerful the prosperous. And so yes – there is division.

No doubt this division cut right through family ties and pitted father against son, mother against daughter – no doubt it made family meals very uncomfortable- especially for the 9s.

Have you ever been at one of those uncomfortable family meals where you are not in sync with others at the table – maybe it's at a holiday meal when an uncle or a cousin or even a parent who has a very different view of things than you do is at the table- and maybe that uncle or cousin or parent seems to relish a good argument or seems to enjoy stirring the pot and so says something that makes your skin crawl.

And then you are faced with a personal dilemma- do you say something – disagree – offer another perspective - risking opening up a feud that is always smoldering just under the surface – or do you keep silent so as to keep the peace and not upset the festivities?

Not too long ago – and this is something of the confession of a 9 – I was at a dinner with a group of people – some relatives and others who were friends of those relatives. All was going well until near the end of the meal one of those friends started a conversation by saying “I'm not a racist, BUT...”

Immediately my stomach started twisting into knots- I knew whatever followed was likely to rile me up. And what followed was a complaint about the choice of

an African American to play the part of Ariel in the new Little Mermaid movie.

This person felt that Ariel was supposed to be white with massive red hair and anything else would confuse her children- after all what would the Ariel at Disney World look like now? And there is Tiana so why do we need a black Ariel?

Well, I had a lot I wanted to say. I wanted to say that Ariel is a mermaid – and what research was done to determine that mermaids are white skinned and red headed? I wanted to say that young children really don't see color and if parents don't make a big deal of it the children would probably work it out in their own minds just fine. I wanted to say that this concern was really a first world problem because the vast majority of children in the world will never go to Disney World. I wanted to remind us that the remake of the musical Annie had been with African Americans and we seem to all have survived somehow.

There was so much I wanted to say – but what did I say – absolutely nothing – I just got up and started clearing the table. I opted to keep the peace.

The trouble is there was no peace for me. I was at war inside and so disappointed in myself for my silence. I knew that anything I said would have come out in a

trembling and perhaps high-pitched voice – I would likely have shown how upset I was and no doubt the evening would have gone downhill and my relatives would not be happy with me. So I kept the peace.

The peace I kept was the peace of this world – the peace that simply means the absence of conflict --not the peace that Jesus offers the disciples and us in the aftermath of the crucifixion when all seems lost and hopeless. Not the peace that passes understanding – the peace the world cannot give.

. In our text Jesus goes on to say that we are to open our eyes and read the signs of the times like we read the weather. And when we do we will see that there is no shortage of conflict and division to be faced if we answer Jesus' call to lift up the lowly, the poor, the captive, the oppressed the marginalized.

There will be no escaping the division – a division that will rock even our most basic human relationships of family, church, community. It will demand our full passion and focus on the work Jesus calls us to do.

Transfiguration experienced that call when you worked tirelessly to change policies that kept our church from fully including all God's people in our life and ministry. It was not easy. It did not happen without division and conflict. Yet this church did not waiver and did not back off. There were risks but you persevered and accomplished God's call on us. And you did it without angry or degrading words – and you were able to do this - I believe - because you were held in the peace of Christ- the peace the world cannot give.

There is more work to do and there will be more conflict and more division.

Our work for God is not finished. The signs of our times make that perfectly clear.

And that will inevitably bring division – there's no escaping it – there will be the division between those who are ever seeking to widen the circle of God's love for more and more people to come in and those who build walls to keep them out.

In a few minutes, Father _____ will say to us - the peace of Christ be always with you. And we will respond = and also with you. And then we will turn and offer that peace – the peace of Christ – to one another.

We do it every week. But this text should make us very aware of what this peace is that we are offering each other. And we might want to offer it – and accept it very carefully – for the peace of Christ is not the peace of this world!!

It is the peace that only God can give us. It is the peace we see living in Jesus – the peace that made it possible for him to say what needed to be said and do what needed to be done – to face conflict and division head on = while still living deeply in the love and peace of his Father.

This peace – the peace of Christ = enables us to do the same. To read the signs of our times, to live into our baptismal vows to persevere in resisting evil, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to strive for justice and peace among all people and to respect the dignity of every human being.

This peace enables us to be the voice of the voiceless –

To rise up against children in cages

To stand up and demand an end to gun violence

To speak out against the treatment of refugees and migrants no matter where they come from

To insist on justice for all not just those who share our race, our ethnicity, our sexual orientation, our religion, our zip code.

Today, when we wish one another the peace of Christ, let's be very aware of what we offer – the peace that sustains us in the midst of division – the peace that allows us to stand up and face conflict head on - the peace the world cannot give – the peace that passes all understanding – the peace that keeps our hearts and minds in the love of God and of his son Jesus Christ our Lord.

The peace of the Lord be with you. Amen.