

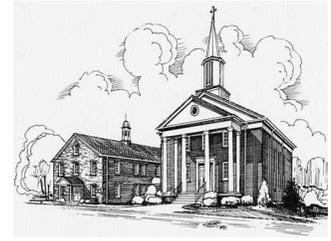
The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Sunday closest to August 17

Proper 15

Year C

RCL



Isaiah 5:1-7

Psalms 80:1-2, 8-18

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

Luke 12:49-56

The Collect

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Isaiah 5:1-7

Let me sing for my beloved
my love-song concerning his vineyard:

My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.

He dug it and cleared it of stones,
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
he expected it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.

And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem
and people of Judah,
judge between me
and my vineyard.

What more was there to do for my vineyard
that I have not done in it?

When I expected it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes?

And now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.

I will remove its hedge,
and it shall be devoured;

I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.
I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and it shall be overgrown with briers and thorns;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.
For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
he expected justice,
but saw bloodshed;
righteousness,
but heard a cry!

Psalm 80:1-2, 8-18 Page 702, 703, BCP

Qui regis Israel

- 1 Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock;
shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.
- 2 In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh,
stir up your strength and come to help us.
- 8 You have brought a vine out of Egypt;
you cast out the nations and planted it.
- 9 You prepared the ground for it;
it took root and filled the land.
- 10 The mountains were covered by its shadow
and the towering cedar trees by its boughs.
- 11 You stretched out its tendrils to the Sea
and its branches to the River.
- 12 Why have you broken down its wall,
so that all who pass by pluck off its grapes?
- 13 The wild boar of the forest has ravaged it,
and the beasts of the field have grazed upon it.
- 14 Turn now, O God of hosts, look down from heaven;
behold and tend this vine;
preserve what your right hand has planted.
- 15 They burn it with fire like rubbish;
at the rebuke of your countenance let them perish.
- 16 Let your hand be upon the man of your right hand,
the son of man you have made so strong for yourself.

17 And so will we never turn away from you;
give us life, that we may call upon your Name.

18 Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

or

Psalm 82 Page 705, BCP

Deus stetit

- 1 God takes his stand in the council of heaven;
he gives judgment in the midst of the gods:
- 2 “How long will you judge unjustly,
and show favor to the wicked?
- 3 Save the weak and the orphan;
defend the humble and needy;
- 4 Rescue the weak and the poor;
deliver them from the power of the wicked.
- 5 They do not know, neither do they understand;
they go about in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.
- 6 Now I say to you, ‘You are gods,
and all of you children of the Most High;
- 7 Nevertheless, you shall die like mortals,
and fall like any prince.’”
- 8 Arise, O God, and rule the earth,
for you shall take all nations for your own.

Luke 12:49-56

Jesus said, “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; 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.”

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. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. 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?"

SERMON

Jesus said, “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; 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.”

It’s shattering to hear the Prince of Peace say “Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!” It challenges every-

thing we thought we understood about Jesus. Somehow, we must work this baffling statement into our understanding of Jesus' message, and if it won't fit into what we thought we knew about Jesus, it is our ideas about Jesus which must give way.

Jesus is clearly telling his listeners that something is about to happen. That something will be like unto a fire. The world after the something will be different than the world before the something, and not in a peaceful way for it will pit father against son and mother against daughter. Jesus' words bring us squarely up to the question many of us avoid. What DID happen? Yes, Jesus was hanged on a tree until he was publicly, thoroughly, convincingly and unquestionably dead. Yes, he was seen thereafter by many, many people. (Paul puts the number at 500 and notes that most of them were still

alive at the time of his writing¹.) Jesus is speaking not only of his coming death and resurrection, but the effects which will be wrought in the world as a result of his death and resurrection. What do you understand to have happened which would be like a fire, which would change the world, which would lead, not to peace but to division? What DID happen?

Is it not that in the agony of His Passion, God displayed before us the cruelty that arises from our self-righteous attempts to treat the world as our own and in the Resurrection that God's mercies can overcome even the worst that we can do? Is it not that in Jesus' death and resurrection, God demonstrated that the world and all that is in it is His and that our attempts to treat it as our own are wrong?

That's not the way we like to view the world. What

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:6

I have is mine. For someone else to take it grants me the right to act in self-defense. The most frequent question I was asked when I was practicing law was this: “If somebody is trying to break into my house and I shoot them, I need to drag the body inside, right?” We don’t just feel we have a right to defend what is ours, we actively seek out opportunities to do so. For me to say these things just opens up divisions and arguments about “stand your ground” or when and in what circumstances one can lawfully shoot dead someone OUTSIDE your house who you imagine is TRYING to break in. For Jesus to demonstrate beyond question, as he will do in the resurrection, that all God’s Creation is God’s, not yours, that realization will sweep history like a firestorm.

If it is no surprise to confessing Christians that the Earth and all that is in it belongs to God, how then do

we get ourselves convinced that it is our duty to drop high explosives in the parts of the world which produce the oil which we want? We do it by dividing God's creation into the good guys, who are to be left alone, and the bad guys, who are to be eliminated, root and branch and by whatever means available. Put another way, we are pleased to imagine that ridding God's creation of those we accuse of evil justifies the use of any means whatsoever. I've noted countless times that the capacity of the human mind to construct good reasons to do bad things is limitless. When we get ourselves convinced that we are fighting for Truth, Justice and the American Way, we exercise that creativity in frightening ways.

Here's where the disputes and division arises. Everybody knows we're the good guys, and God is on our side. If I even hint that we're not the good guys, several of you will get mad, so I won't. Instead, I'll ask you to

consider what good and bad means.

C.S. Lewis, the guy who wrote “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe”, was one of the Twentieth Century’s most celebrated Christian apologists. A Christian apologist isn’t someone who apologizes for Christianity. A Christian apologist DEFENDS Christianity, and the Twentieth Century did not produce many who did it better than C.S. Lewis. In a book adapted from a series of BBC radio talks made while he was at Oxford during World War II, he said something that should get your little gray cells percolating.

You can be good for the mere sake of goodness: you cannot be bad for the mere sake of badness. You can do a kind action when you are not feeling kind and when it gives you no pleasure, simply because kindness is right; but no one ever did a cruel action simply because cruelty is wrong—only because cruelty was pleasant or useful to him. In other words badness cannot

succeed even in being bad in the same way in which goodness is good. Goodness is, so to speak, itself; badness is only spoiled goodness. And there must be something good first before it can be spoiled.²

“Badness is only spoiled goodness. And there must be something good first before it can be spoiled.” If you really think about that sentence, I bet you get your back up. We rebel against any suggestion that our enemies have anything of good within them — they’re like Crabby Appleton, rotten to the core. We want to divide people into the good guys who do good stuff in pursuit of a more perfect world and the bad guys who do bad stuff in pursuit of a worse world because that’s what bad guys do, and we’re all going to be safer when we run down all the bad guys and destroy them. Not surprisingly, we identify ourselves with the good guys, which we see as giving us permission to visit calamity

² “Mere Christianity” C.S. Lewis

upon the heads of the bad guys.

Mr. Lewis begs to disagree, but the notion that it's up to the good guys to expunge the bad guys has enormous appeal among whatever group you would like to consider. A few months ago, the Pakistani Taliban shot a 15 year old girl in the head for daring to seek an education. This week, the Afghani Taliban kidnapped a female member of parliament AND her children, having failed to assassinate a different female MP earlier. I know good and well that you are thinking of the Taliban right now as the ultimate bad guys, but if we could sit down and speak with them, I'm sure they would reject any suggestion that they are doing bad things for the sake of badness. I'm sure they would respond that they are following the commandments of God. In their view, God has prohibited women from holding positions of authority over men. Thus, it is they who are being right-

eous because they are following God's judgment in
Genesis 3:16

To the woman he said,
'...yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.'

Since this is God's judgment on women, they would argue, they are the good guys and the good guys get to do bad stuff to the bad guys because that's their duty. As Proverbs puts it, "All deeds are right in the sight of the doer."³

In Louisa next month the Ku Klux Klan will have a "Cross Lighting". They announced that they are "Looking at the obesity issue, teenage girls with kids and drug issue, Louisa needs God and the Klan." They don't hate African-Americans, they will tell you. Instead, they say, "The Bible commands against race-mixing" and insist that they are Bible-lead. You and I might respond that

³ Prov 21:2

you can scoop that up from behind the horse it fell out of and put it around your roses, but they think they're doing something good. "No drugs allowed", remarked Rev. Jeremy James on reading the announcement, "but bring all the hate you want, and let's bathe Jesus in our hatred!" They have convinced themselves that they are pursuing God's will!

We are too frail and flawed, church, to undertake to judge God's creation. Acceptance of that confession of limitation requires great humility, and modern man doesn't do humble very well.

Jesus, from the cross, cried out, "Pour it on! Bathe me in your hatred! Do to me the worst that you can imagine. Scourge me, beat me, humiliate me, strip my very humanity from me and nail me to a cross, and yet I will overcome everything you can do. I will rise again. But first, look upon my broken body and see the wages

of your self-righteousness.”

From the cross, Jesus displayed before us the extent of our willingness to engage in cruelty in pursuit of self-righteousness. In the resurrection, the Christ showed us that this is God’s world. We are God’s creatures, but we are flawed, willful, and proud. We often find ourselves resentful of our need for God’s strong, nurturing hand, but the truth is that we live in His hands and by his commandments. We are not permitted to act outside God’s commandments to us in order to remake His creation into forms pleasing to us. Living in faith is living within that certainty – that God created the world and it is His. We are not permitted to repaint the walls or move the furniture around to suit our taste.

Thus, Jesus said that what was to come would be the source of great division for what DID happen wasn’t an evolution. Jesus’ death and resurrection did

not signal that the good guys had won and the bad guys were destroyed. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, what was changed was not the rulers, but the rules. Before was the kingdom of man, who judged his brother and thought himself righteous. After, there was the Kingdom of God and the judging was to be done by God, alone.

“Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!” for no one who has lived in an illusion of righteousness and power will happily abandon his illusion. Yes, there will be fire and division.

Our obligation within the Kingdom of God is to live by His commandments. These commandments are not complicated. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as

yourself.”⁴

Wake from your dream of the kingdom of man,
church, and embrace the Kingdom of God!

AMEN

⁴ Luke 10:27

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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