

Readings: Is: 5:1-7, Heb. 11:29-1:2, Luk. 12:49-56

Once a king decided to hold a great race in his kingdom. All the young men of the kingdom came to participate. The race began and ended in the king's courtyard and the prize was a bag of gold. As they ran the race, the runners were surprised to find a great pile of stones blocking their way, but they managed to climb over or around it. Finally, all the runners except one, had crossed the finishing line, but still the king did not end the race. While the run was continuing, a lone runner stumbled through the gate and said to the king, "I am sorry, I am late, O king, but you see I found a great pile of rocks in the road." Showing his bleeding hand; he said, "I injured myself to remove all stones, and underneath I found this bag of gold." The king said to him, "you have won the race." He added, "the best runner is the one who makes the way safe for others."

Making the way safe for others is a missional agenda we see in the words of Jesus Christ, which is been narrated in the 12th chapter of the gospel of St. Luke. In this chapter we see Jesus takes up 45 verses to reassure and encourage his followers in the face of possible catastrophic circumstances. But at the same time this chapter ends on a far less positive note. Rather than encouraging reassurance, Jesus says that he came to bring fire to the earth, and that his ministry would bring division. He insists that he will not bring peace. Instead, his ministry would divide families and turn individual members of households against one another. The ministry of our Lord is to rain fire from heaven.

In the old Testament, one of the words used for "Fire" in Hebrew is "Ash." The Hebrew letter 'A' – aleph often refers to God, and 'Sh' infers bringing forth, or birth. So the word Ash would mean 'The bringing forth or birth of God in us.' That means we can safely interpret the word 'Fire' to mean the bringing forth of God in us, although there would be other meanings to the usage of the word 'Fire.' In ancient Greek philosophy, Heraclitus the philosopher considered 'Fire' to be one of the primary forms of the real world and quite lot of people in ancient times believed that fire, air, earth, and water are primary elements and substances of the world.

The first century audience understood the imagery of fire more readily than we in the modern day understand. For them, fire was theophany – the manifestation of God. When Moses was tending the flocks of his father-in-law on Mount Horeb, the Lord God spoke to him out of a burning bush. When the Hebrew people were wandering in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, the Lord God led them at night with a pillar of fire. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God, appeared to the apostles in the upper room as tongues of fire. So it did not puzzle his listeners when Jesus said that he was to bring fire on the earth. They believed Jesus to be God's son, and it was an ancient idea

for God's presence to be manifested to by fire. It would also not surprise them that Jesus spoke of God's presence being divisive. Jesus warns, those who follow his teachings, will be considered revolutionaries.

Jesus tells those of us who strive to follow him even today that when his message sinks into our hearts and minds, it can cause trouble in our families. If we choose to follow Christ, we can get into trouble at work. While Jesus reveals the struggles in the journey of witnessing to the love and peace of God, He wants us to understand that the kingdom of God that Jesus introduced was quite radical. Therefore, we need to be radical obedience to the will of God.

Remember, Jesus was crucified. Most of his disciples met violent deaths at the hands of those who were outraged at the revolutionary changes they wanted to make both in society and in the lives of individuals. There is evidence in history. When Pliny the governor of a province in Asia Minor, he wrote to the Roman emperor, telling him that he didn't know what these Christians believed exactly but had noted that they were the most wilful, obstinate, rebellious, disobedient people he had ever encountered and so had put some of them to death just on general principles. How that differs from the claims the Church makes on people's lives today! Jesus said that he came to rain fire from heaven. But the last couple thousand years we have managed to get the fire under control by reducing it to the candles on the altar. Instead of high demands and radical changes, we think Christianity is to make us feel good about ourselves. Rather than an institution inciting revolutionary change, the community today wants the Church to be a well-maintained, quiet presence that never challenges lives. Every once in a while, however, someone catches fire for God.

Some people catch the vision that there is more to the life than just acquiring more and more. Some realise that their Christian faith calls them to do something for others, rather than just feeling good about themselves. Some people decide to choose spiritual ways to save the life of others. Some people feel the heat of God's presence and are moved to extravagant generosity. Some people catch on fire with the presence of God and do things that disrupt their family life, just as Jesus predicted.

There are so many of them in history. Rudy Henry Wiebe, in his book, "The blue Mountains of China," writes,

"Jesus says in his society there is a new way for people to live:

You show wisdom, by trusting people;

You handle leadership, by serving;

You handle offenders, by forgiving;

You handle money, by sharing;

You handle enemies, by loving;

You handle violence, by suffering."

The fire - I see and experience at this time of meditation is a beginning of a new faith journey together with my dear sisters and brothers of All Saints Lockerbie. We are called to make the way safe for others. Through sending fire on us, God reminds us that He called us to make the way safe for others. Through sending fire on us, God reminds us that He guides us to make the safe for others. Through sending fire on us, God reminds us that He anoints us to make way safe for others. Amen.