

## Stories of Life Pentecost 12 - 15<sup>th</sup> August 2010

### **Readings:**

**Isaiah 5:1-7, Luke 12: 49-56, Hebrews 11:29 - 12:2**

### A HEALTH WARNING!

An apology for this morning's gospel. It comes with a health warning!  
Probably the hardest word that Jesus preaches in his gospel.

Before we hear the gospel, hand up if religion has caused a problem in your family. Too much? - Too little? I wonder why we get ourselves into such a lather? Sometimes the response towards religious people is that they are a bunch of hypocrites who never live out what they preach. And I have to admit that there's some truth in that. First the prophets and then Jesus were always railing against hypocrisy. Others point to the fact that religion causes all sorts of strife with its exclusive claims to the truth - and again this is particularly true of Christianity- that at times is all too willing to judge and condemn and sometimes punish, those who do not believe the truths they proclaim. And perhaps - just perhaps there is a touch of guilt on behalf of those who want to temper religious fervour.

A little bit of religion goes a long way.

So religion is a tricky business. And we are here this morning welcoming in little Angus into a faith that divides, according to Jesus in this passage from Luke's gospel.

### Luke 12:49-56

"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?

**THIS IS THE GOSPEL OF THE LORD!**

As I grow older I become increasingly concerned that I forget things. And I talk to others who seem to have the same problem. My doctor reassures me that it part and parcel of growing old. The cheek! But I guess he has a point, but you still wonder - Am I losing it! - because our memory is a precious thing and forgetting things can get us in all sorts of

trouble. But it's not only individuals that have memory problems. Whole nations seem to have the problem. Listen as I tell you of a story of memory lost.

There once was a land of great beauty and promise, flowing with milk and honey. And people wandered there, struggled through the wilderness to get there, were surely led by God there. The people came to a nation where the stranger would be shown hospitality. They came to build a holy land where children could laugh and play without danger and old people rest and remember in safety. They came to build a just community where people's land would not be stolen, where the able would work for fair wages, the sick receive care and the poor eat their fill. All of that was promised in the land that God gave to be a light to the nations.

But people forgot. They forgot that the good life in the promised land depends upon promises made and kept to God and to each other. They forgot the first promise to love the Lord your God with your whole heart and with your soul and with your mind and they forgot their second promise that is bound closely to the first - to love your neighbour as yourself. They forgot and pretty soon they were on another wilderness road that has led to Israel 2010 - Jerusalem 2010. A road that's led to fanatical suicide bombers and Zionist settlers crazy for land.

The prophet Isaiah, like all the prophets, tells of the foolishness of folk.

He uses a metaphor of a vineyard and in the reading of the story from Isaiah you almost can feel the sadness of the owner of the vineyard as the vineyard produces nothing but sour grapes and eventually is destroyed. Our God the owner of the vineyard.

Seven hundred years after Isaiah told his story of a vineyard gone sour another story teller appeared in the centre of this land populated by people who forgot. His name was Jesus who came to bring peace and who came to bring unpeace. He came to disturb. He came to disturb the religious people of his day who had forgotten and should have known better. His coming brought division. Division between those who sought to keep a status quo that allowed the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer. A status quo that marked out various people who were unclean, who were unacceptable to the religious people of his day. So he Jesus says to his disciples - do you think I came to bring peace? How can we have peace with so much injustice, so much greed. Jesus' words were taken seriously by the early church and for Luke and his readers Jesus' words about family member against family member must have rung true. For to follow Jesus in those early years of the church meant division.

And today Jesus continues to disturb. For we continue to forget. Jesus' presence then and now is a reminder that our society is not as it should be. We belong to a world that spends over \$10 billion a minute on military expenses. We live in a world where half the human family does not have safe drinking water. We live in a world where the wealthy nations have problems with obesity and the poorer nations have over 900 million people malnourished. And Jesus has come to disturb and to divide to shake us from our stupor so that we might not forget but remember - that the vineyard that Isaiah spoke of might once again bear good grapes.

But not everyone forgot. The epistle reading for this morning talks of a great cloud of witnesses who have borne testimony to God's goodness and pointed to the way where God and neighbour are loved with all our hearts mind and body. That's why we're here this

morning. I'd like to think that each of us is here because someone, one of that great cloud of witnesses, has touched our life. Shown us the way of Christ, the way to turn our sour grapes into the sweet fruits of the master's vineyard.

That's why Angus has been baptized, the latest in a long line of Christian witnesses. A new witness rising out of the waters of baptism ready for new life. My prayer is that Angus will not forget his brush with God here in these baptismal waters. My prayer is that his parents, and all who have witnessed this celebration will not forget the significance of the promises made and my prayer is that the congregation will pay heed to the promises we have made. For without baptisms like Angus' people will forget and the vineyard will continue to bear sour grapes.

*Rev Tony Duncan*  
*15<sup>th</sup> August 2010*  
*pilgrim.tony@tassie.net.au*