

St. Columba's Episcopal Church
The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – July 6, 2025
Isaiah 66:10-14; Galatians 6:7-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20
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This morning's readings from the Bible deal with large issues, major themes related to a life of faith. Justice and mercy. The world as it is and God's promises for a different future. How to act now, in this world as it is now, while we wait for God.

Let's begin with St. Paul's letter to the church in Galatia. We read a portion of this letter last week, and I spoke then about Paul's reminder that, as followers of Christ, we are to live by the commandment to love. Living by the Spirit – the Holy Spirit – means living by this commandment. Living according to "the flesh" means living in ways contrary to love, living selfishly. In today's reading from this letter Paul reiterates this theme. He also speaks about circumcision. The issue of circumcision is no longer relevant to us today, but the basic point Paul is making is that "externals" are not what is important. What is important is what we do, how we live by love, how we "work for the good of all." Jesus also taught that what is in our hearts – love or whatever opposes love – is most important because it is out of the heart – our feelings, will, thought, and intentions – that our actions flow. These issues remain as relevant today as they were 2,000 years ago.

Paul gives an interesting warning in today's passage: "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow" (Galatians 6:7). In the world, as we all know, people often do not reap what they sow. Kind people are treated unkindly and unkind people are treated with kindness. Generous people are taken advantage of by less generous people. The compassion of compassionate people is not returned. Hypocrites are not held to account. People cause all manner of trouble – sometimes unspeakable damage – and walk away, leaving behind hurts that are difficult or even impossible to heal. We can all think of examples in our own experience, in the lives of others, in the world.

I'm sure you all know the saying attributed to Abraham Lincoln: "You can fool some of the people all of the time, all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all the time." I think Paul is reminding us that you can't fool God any of the time. People deceive themselves when they think that they can fool God the way they can sometimes fool others. We are reminded of this every Sunday in the words of the Collect for Purity, "Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid." Paul asserts that living according to the Spirit of love will ultimately lead to eternal life – sharing in the life of God – while living selfishly will not lead to eternal life.

In this morning's lesson from the Gospel of Luke, we read that Jesus sent seventy of his disciples out to do his work in the world, with great power, but with a stern warning: "See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." Remember that Jesus has now set his face to Jerusalem and to the cross. His mood is serious and determined. His words are anything but soft and comforting. He is entirely realistic about the power of the evil forces he faces and that his followers will face.

These disciples traveled as ambassadors of Jesus. They were to go in peace and, if welcomed, cure the sick and proclaim that the Kingdom of God had come near – good news. But, if not welcomed, they were to wipe the dust of the town off their feet and leave. By shaking the dust off their feet the followers of Jesus were indicating to the people that they were

not responsible for the fate of those who did not welcome them. Their announcement that the Kingdom of God had come near was a reproach rather than a blessing in the places where they, and by extension, Jesus and God were not welcome.

The disciples return from their mission, full of joy because of their many successes. They were able to do great deeds of power in Jesus' name, as his ambassadors. "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" They are giddy with the power to win battles against evil forces. Jesus cuts through their joy with another stern warning: "Do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). Having one's name written in heaven means the same thing that Paul means by eternal life. Jesus is teaching his disciples – including us – that what matters most is sharing in the life of God.

In today's reading from the Old Testament book of Isaiah the Lord makes promises of comfort and prosperity to Jerusalem and to God's people. We are meant to understand that whatever misfortune and hardship are present now – "all you who mourn over [Jerusalem]" – in the future God will be to God's servants – the people who love God and walk in God's ways – as a loving mother comforting her child.

We need to hear these promises of God. If you have worked and fought in the past for peace, for racial justice and equality, for women's rights, for the environment, or other important causes, you may be very discouraged by what is happening in the world now. You may be thinking - again? Do we have to work all over again for these same issues? Didn't we get anywhere with all the struggles of the past?

The world as it is is not the same as the future God promises to those who love God. Absolutely not. Jesus knew this and we know it. What do we do while we wait for the coming of God? We can do the soul work of growing in love. Each of us knows the places in our hearts where love has not yet reached. Each of us knows what we do each day that is contrary to loving God and our neighbors as ourselves. All of us need to grow in love, with God's help.

Two weeks ago I quoted these famous words of the prophet Micah found in the Hebrew Bible (Micah 6:8): "[The Lord] has told you, O human, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: only to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). In the Talmud, a rabbinic commentary on the legal portions of the Old Testament, the rabbis referred to this quote from Micah and wrote: "Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it." "You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it." What words of guidance, so relevant to us today.

I hope and pray that our gathering for worship on Sunday mornings helps you to continue to live in God's ways – to love and to work for justice, to act with mercy, to grow in humility. All of us have the opportunity to be ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. We can demonstrate our love for God and one another and for the world God made in action. We can "work for the good of all." The ways we do that will be as varied as our circumstances and our particular gifts. However we are led by God to act, we need to remember God's promises. As I said last week, we need the support of remembering where we are headed – to be with Jesus, at home in God's house. This will help us to continue God's work, though we may be tempted to abandon it. Our way may not be easy, but we have the assurance that we are headed in the right direction. By God's grace and in Jesus' name. Amen.