



*Come From Away*

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

*Tenth Sunday after Pentecost ~ Sunday, August 18th, 2019*

*First Federated Church of Peoria Illinois*

*The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.*

*Text: "Do you think that I have come to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.*

*(Jesus, Luke 12: 51)*

Come from Away is the story of 9-11, the disruptions and uncertainty of that day. Because no one knew what was really happening, planes were diverted from the States. As a consequence, 38 planes, 7000 travelers and 19 animals in cargo landed at the tiny airport in Gander, Newfoundland, doubling the small town's population. The story explores the hardships, the adjustments, and the relationships formed and broken as the citizens of Gander, the crew, and passengers of the 38 airplanes find themselves in a new reality.

As I watched the story unfold in the back of my mind I kept mulling over Jesus' words, "Do you think that I have come to bring peace on earth? No...but rather division. They are unsettling words and so "un-Jesus" like, aren't they. Yet, they do capture the radical nature of his message that led him to the Cross. I have seen church stained glass windows of Jesus knocking on the door to the human heart, of Jesus cradling lambs, and of him having a child sit on his lap. But I have never seen a stained glass window of Jesus holding a whip and clearing the Temple of the moneychangers, have you? We like our Jesus to be meek and mild. We like him to be unchallenging, and if the truth be told, rather passive. We want a "tame" Jesus. But Jesus did not come into this world to bless its brokenness. He came to show the world a new way. His message is an inconvenient truth. It is hard and uncomfortable. It challenges. It gets in the way of doing things "my way".

As many of you know I have strong feelings about the placement of the baptismal font. It needs to be in a central location, if not in the entry of the sanctuary. It needs to "get in the way" and not be pushed off to the side because it reminds us of our discipleship which was never intended to be convenient. Our baptism gets in the way of life as we remember God's claim upon our lives. As the letter to the Romans says, If we live, we live unto the Lord, and if we die, we die unto the Lord. So, whether we live or whether we die, we die unto the Lord. (14:8)

Syncretism, or the blending of two belief systems into a new belief system, has long been a threat, first to the Jewish and then, to the Christian faith. As Evangelical Christian author Ben Howe noted in his book *The Immoral Majority*, we have an uncanny knack of deceiving ourselves into believing what we want to believe. We can justify anything that we want to have. Too often we convince ourselves with a selfish logic that the ends justify the means. It is true in the acquisition of money or power or position or whatever our little hearts desire. In so doing, we can also demonize those who stand in the way of what we want.

This is what lies behind our reading in Isaiah. In the prophet's words you can hear God's grief. 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. ... Why? ... What else could I have done?

In his profound book *Red Letter Revolution: What If Jesus Really Meant What He Said*, so named after the "red letter" editions of the Bible where the words of Jesus are highlighted in red, Tony Campolo challenged contemporary Christians by asking a very simple question. "What if Jesus really meant what he said?" We have gotten away, he maintains, from the simple, practical teachings of Jesus. "When Jesus said (in the Sermon on the Mount), 'Love your enemies, ... He probably meant that we shouldn't kill them. In that same sermon Jesus said, 'Blessed are the merciful for they shall have mercy,' ... He meant it ... Especially when he goes on to say it's no longer an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

Campolo goes on to say that it's time to focus not on the teachings of Paul or the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament but upon the actual words of Jesus. When we do this, we have a very different Christianity emerging. It is a Christianity based on justice and peace. This Christianity is concerned for the poor. This Christianity has a passion for the least, the last, the lost, and the lonely. At the time of judgement, Jesus said, "the Lord will not ask theological questions but how well we fulfilled his commands."

Those who decide to take Jesus seriously are "secret agents" infiltrating every nook and cranny of this world, living out the love of God, and working for justice at every opportunity. We are to be involved in stopping violence on the Southside and Near Northside as well as in the homes of the affluent. Serious followers of Jesus are not provincial. We are not confined to our own city or country. We serve a big God who gave us a big commission. That is one of the blessings of our annual rummage sale. The proceeds support mission in our own community and in faraway places. Our Passport for Hope provides allows the chacora--"garbage people" of Mombasa, the boys who live on the streets--into Wana Wa Mola--God's children. It is the ultimate reclamation project.

Taking God seriously is not easy. But we are not pioneers. Our reading from the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that others have traveled this way before us. When their backs were up against the wall with the Red Sea on one side and the Egyptians on the other, God provided a way out of no way for the Hebrews. God continually called the faithful--Rahab the prostitute who assisted with the falling of the walls of Jericho, Gideon and Barak and Samson and David and Samuel and the prophets, "who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, ... shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness".

We are surrounded by a veritable cloud of witnesses who have shown us the way of discipleship. So, let us lay aside every weight, every excuse, every fear that holds us back and run the race justice and freedom and love throughout the whole wide world--for the glory of God.

Amen.