

Pentecost 24, November 12, 2023 proper 27

Most tragically, the news of the war in Gaza is just horrific. Thousands dead, almost of them are half children, hospitals bombed, besieged and broken, unable to care for the severely wounded. As one commentator I heard exclaim recently, at the end of another report on the depth of pain he had witnessed, "If there is Hell on earth, it is Gaza." Of course, the atrocities of Hamas visited upon Israelis a month ago that set off this current round of violence were every bit as shocking and disturbing, but now the day after day, the endless carnage of the Israeli counterattacks are just too much to bear. There was a slight glimmer of light this week as Israel agreed to a daily pause in the hostilities to allow civilians in the northern section of Gaza to escape to the south; but even that is certainly too little too late as the amount of aid and relief is strictly limited and not enough to sustain the population of two million with water, food and medications. Meanwhile, throughout the world, Jews, Muslims, Christians, Hindus and all others pray for an end to this nightmare, but seemingly to no avail, seemingly to a God who no longer hears the cries of the people. Even worse, within our own nation and in the nations of Europe and in other locations across the globe, incidents of anti-semitism and islamophobia are on the rise, allowing the flames of hatred from the Middle East to stoke fires elsewhere. This certainly all goes to demonstrate, as if any demonstration was needed, that war is not the answer. And of course, this comes on Veterans Day weekend, that eleventh day of the eleventh month when peace was finally achieved, and the Veterans could lay down their arms and return home in celebration. But of course, this was not a lasting peace, and although we remember Veterans, and we also celebrated the tradition of Christian pacifism, those who serve not with arms, but by serving others and working for peace, we are still a world in the midst of war, from Yemen, to Sudan, to Ukraine and now Palestine. This deep, complex and complicated history of violence and warfare, a history almost as old as humanity itself, it once again calls forth our attention, as an existential threat as deep and destructive as the climate crisis we face. In our reflections together, in our faithful actions, we are called, my beloved friends in Christ, we are called to struggle with the threat and to engage in hopeful action against such a desperate and dangerous situation.

Prayer: Most merciful and Glorious God, this day we hear your words in the midst of terrible news of war and violence; may your word bring us peace and peace to your world. This we ask in the Name of Jesus our savior and friend. Amen.

Of course, part of the manner in which we are taught to deal with dangers that we face is to be ready to name them, recognize them and be aware of their power in our lives. Jesus' teaching in Matthew's gospel this morning is given to us in this light: after Jesus' teaching on the Temple Mount, he rest with his friends opposite the Temple on the Mount of Olives. There Jesus spoke of what is to come, the confrontation with the religious authorities of his day that would become even more intense, and he spoke a few more parables for his followers. In the parable we hear this morning, Jesus compares the coming of God's kingdom to the ten bridesmaids, but only half of them are prepared, recognizing what is needed, and when the unprepared realize what is about to happen, they are literally left out in the cold, and as cruel as it sounds, it is the ones who have paid attention, those who have kept awake who are able to fully recognize the life they live and the call of love in their lives. Jesus bids his friends, Jesus bids you and me, my beloved friends in Christ, to keep awake, to recognize the love coming into our lives and life of the world and to be ready by already living into that love.

But I believe an even fuller notion of what it means to live fully in the love of God is shown in our portion of the Hebrew Scriptures this morning. After the time of the Exodus, after the deliverance of the people of Israel from the oppression and cruelty of their bondage and slavery, after they have wandered in the wilderness for two generations, learning to live in the freedom God has graciously granted to them and sustained by God's loving providence, now they have come into the land promised to their ancestors, and Joshua addresses the people now, in a final, climactic address. After all they have been through, after all the trials and tribulations, after the temptations and triumph, Joshua calls the people together one last time. Rather than a celebration, however, Joshua takes them back to the beginning, "Long ago your ancestors...." Reciting their history, and now giving the people one more chance to affirm their life in God's loving care: "Choose this day whom you will serve!" Against the existential threats arrayed against them, now the people are called to the depth of their existence, to follow in the way of God, the God who loves them into freedom and the God who frees them into loving. Here, here it is that they are called, here it is that Joshua tells them to incline their hearts to God, to open their souls to obey, to serve, yes, to love the Lord their God.

In the dangers and despair we face in our own day, perhaps this word to look back to the beginning, "Long ago your ancestors..." maybe that is the word for us this day too. Just as Jesus bids us keep awake, be

aware and ready for the love promised to come into our world and our lives, there is also the importance of our own existential choice: "Choose this day whom you will serve!" We are given this choice today, but perhaps even deeper, it calls us to open our eyes, to open our hearts and our souls to the **deepest choice that has been made already**: God almighty, God the creator of all that is, God in **God's love has chosen you**, God loves you and has God has chosen you and me in this time and place to be the people of God, gathered here at Good Shepherd, God has chosen us, you and me, by coming in love, bringing Jesus into our lives to guide us in the way of God's love and peace, to enfold us in that love to reach out from the cross in a loving and saving embrace. God now calls us to live in the fullness of that love; to let our hearts be broken by the death and violence in Israel and Gaza as God's heart is broken, but to look for the spirit and faith to know that God's goodness will prevail, to see with the eyes of faith that horizon of the coming of God's peace, and to dedicate our lives in being those peacemakers in our day. This is our hope as Paul mentions to his friends in Thessalonica, that our grief is different because of that hope, that we can encourage others and take actions in that hope. Because God has chosen us in love, because God has given us the fullness of love in Christ Jesus, we can open our hearts in thanks, open our souls in the deep gratitude to the Spirit of Love so graciously showered upon us. In thanksgiving and gratitude, in response to God's love, we chose this day, we gather around this Altar, we come into the presence of Christ to be fed and nourished for the task of carrying out God's mission of peace with justice in our lives and our world. Thanks be to God for the gracious choice to show us mercy and thanks be to Christ for opening the Way of Love for our lives. Amen.