

Readings for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

17th August 2025

First Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7

I will 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.

And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah,

judge between me and my vineyard.

What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?

When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard.

I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured;

I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

I will make it a wasteland; it shall not be pruned or hoed,

and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns;

I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel,

and the people of Judah are his cherished garden;

he expected justice but saw bloodshed;

righteousness but heard a cry!

Second Reading: Hebrews 11:12-12:2

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death; they were sawn in two; they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains and in caves and holes in the ground.

Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had

provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Gospel: St Luke 12:32-40

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptised, 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?"

A Reflection for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Some of you will, I am sure, be familiar with Robert Frost's poem *The Road Not Taken*. It begins as follows:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;...

and concludes:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Apparently, Frost wrote it as a joke for a friend who, when they went walking together, was known for his indecisiveness about the route and often wanted to change his mind after one path had been embarked upon. However, it has become a meditation on the choices we make in life, whether impulsively or with intent. It always reminds me of the verse in Matthew's Gospel that speaks of choosing between the broad and narrow ways.

Choice is something we all face repeatedly in our lives and, at some point, we all need to decide who or what we will follow and what our core moral values are. It can take a while, perhaps a very long while, to reach that point of decision, and, on the way, we may weigh up the costs and benefits of particular courses of action.

Over the past several weeks, we have heard accounts of Jesus teaching his followers as he journeyed from Galilee towards Jerusalem. Some of the people travelling with him were committed to his cause and to following him; others would have been curious passers-by, intrigued what he had to say, but not especially interested; yet others would have been somewhere in between, casual listeners initially whose attention was captured and who wanted to learn more, to go deeper. Not so very different from the Church today.

Jesus' teachings have shown his followers a vision of what human life can be like when people hold to the values of God's kingdom in keeping God at the centre of our lives, living with concern for justice and the good of others and of the world, guiding how we speak and behave. And then suddenly, we come to a passage like this morning's Gospel. Why did Jesus speak these harsh words about coming to bring fire, wishing it was already kindled; about division rather than peace, division that will split families?

In some ways, it shouldn't be a surprise to us. After Jesus' birth, Simeon prophesied to Mary that her child would be a sign that would be opposed. And John the Baptist said that he baptised with water but that one would come after him who would baptise with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Here is the fire. In Jesus' words, we sense his frustration. His teaching is already beginning to engender opposition from the authorities, and he knows that he won't be with his followers for much longer. The religious leaders of the day had lost their way, their hearts set on their own glory not God's, and they were already working out how to get rid of Jesus.

This loss of direction was nothing new, of course. The lament in today's passage from Isaiah is that the people, represented by the vineyard, had turned away from God's ways despite his care for them, and Isaiah denounced their injustice. Jesus came to draw the people back to God and the time was coming when those following him would have to make really serious choices, costly choices, about whether or not to follow him. Choices that would inevitably lead to division as people made different choices.

This would probably have been a familiar scenario for the original audience of Luke's Gospel. They are likely to have been Gentile converts to Christianity whose own conversion may have caused divisions within their families. It was written at a time when the church was persecuted so the costliness of choosing to follow Jesus would have been only too evident.

It's also worth noting that although Jesus said that his coming would bring division not peace, he does not say that is what he desired; he just knew it was what would happen.

Jesus passionately wanted God's people to choose God's ways, to be filled with fiery passion themselves, to follow the two greatest commandments of loving God and loving their neighbours as themselves, and he was frustrated that they seemed to be slow on the uptake when time was short. Why can't his audiences, who are so clever at interpreting the signs of the weather, not also see what is happening in front of their very eyes? He called them hypocrites. If they were paying attention, they should understand his call to living a transformed life that reflects God's kingdom values, and also recognise where his ministry is likely to lead and the opposition it would encounter in just a short time.

I wonder what he would say about us today.

It's worth noting that Jesus' call to holiness and righteous living was first made to his followers, not to others. This is a message for us, and we have a choice. To follow Jesus requires commitment. It is not easy. It demands that we

pick ourselves up and try again when we fall, and do so repeatedly. It may mean facing the discouragement or criticism of those we are close to. But division doesn't have to mean war, and acceptance of difference doesn't have to mean compromising our principles.

We need to know that we are not alone in this. God's love for us is a given, and God wants the fullest and most abundant life possible for each of us, the life God made us for. Living that life with integrity enables God's love to be made manifest to others and it becomes something they too can choose.

And we are also not alone because, cheering us on from the sidelines is that great cloud of witnesses to which the letter to the Hebrews refers. Continuing on from last week, the writer has a long list of heroes who did the right thing, who followed God's ways in the most difficult of circumstances. They demonstrated courage in the face of adversity, and the author insists that they did so by faith, putting their trust in God. Now they are waiting for us to run our race, completing the part allotted to us in the fulfilment of God's kingdom.

We always have a choice. Let us choose without hesitation, in the words of Hebrews, to 'run with perseverance the race that is set before us , looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith...'