Believe me, that when I first saw that these were today’s scripture readings, I groaned. Frankly, I was hoping for something a bit less strident, just a bit lighter in tone and context. Especially after what was an amazing but very tiring week of VBS. I really knew I wasn't nearly as young as I once was. At the close of each evening, Epsom salts were my friend and gratitude my companion. Perhaps that’s where God the heavenly parent and God the earthly dwelling son are today. A little tired and patience is running just a bit thin.

I did find some comfort in the opening of Jeremiah today…

*Am I a God nearby, says the Lord, and not a God far off? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? Do I not fill heaven and earth?(Jer. 23:23)*

Of course, the intent of the passage is to stress the need to be cautious of those that proclaim false prophesy. *“Let the one who has my word speak it faithfully.”* Jeremiah speaks a truth that God will not into be made into some prop in a human drama. God will not be domesticated; God’s will, twisted into line with a certain agenda.

And his words speak of the nature and character of God. This is God, the One that is near to us, filling the earth and heavens with Presence, in all ways knowing us, in whatever place and condition we are found.

And, God has expectations of us. When we forget faithfulness to the Word, we lose the ability to tell fact from fiction, and we are but lost and wandering children. Ours is a God that not only desires, but expects, our trust and devotion to God’s kingdom of justice, peace and righteousness.

This is where the text from Luke comes in today. Jesus speaks of peace, conflict and division. “Do you think I have come to bring peace? No, I tell you, but rather division….to kindle fire on the earth.” I think it would have been interesting to be a fly on the wall when Jesus spoke the words we have heard today. I’ll bet the reactions were not all that different from our own.

Isn’t this the same Jesus that proclaimed the Shalom of God, who preached “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be children of God.” At the Last Supper he told his disciples, “My Peace I leave with you, my own peace I give to you.” Do we not in our own Baptismal vows promise as followers of God in Christ to “strive for justice and peace”?

We are a people that are committed to peace, but peace is not an easy thing to bring forth. There is conflict in our world, conflict between nations and peoples, between races and ethnicities and religions. Jesus seems to place division, not war, as the opposite of peace. And, there are a myriad sources of division that Evil places in our pathway.

When Jesus speaks of bringing division, it is with the knowledge of just how deeply the forces of the present order of the world are imbedded in us. Our baptism calls us to be Peace-makers, actively involved in pursuing peace and healing in this world. It’s ironic that when you Google “Peace-Maker” many references are to weapons and warfare. It is as if the only way to peace is by possessing more and more items manufactured for destruction.

And the false prophets are more popular than ever, saying whatever they need in order to gather others to them for affirmation of their divisive ways. Bringing about the way of God’s kingdom is counterintuitive to the way that much of the powers in this world function, and the result may well bring conflict to even the most intimate of relationships.

Jesus preaches and teaches the way of the Kingdom of God will come about…

* Not by might, but by forgiveness
* Not by fear, but by courage
* Not by arrogance, but with humility

These words – forgiveness, courage, humility – remind me of the ways that our children learned this week about God’s Heroes. The qualities we introduced – **Heart, Courage, Wisdom, Hope and Power** – were all exemplified by biblical characters and stories.

And, we met heroes in the community as well – librarians, fire and rescue professionals, teachers and, of course, our volunteers.

One moment that rose up for me as a significant time in our week was when an officer from the Peterborough Police Dept. came to speak with our kids. Office Justin was taking questions from the children and he was asked about the items he carried around his waist on his belt. He explained this was his “duty belt” and contained items that were helpful to him during his days on patrol. There was a pouch with gloves, a flashlight, a pair of handcuffs, a taser, pepper spray, and a firearm with 2 magazines of ammunition.

Of course, there were many questions, from both girls and boys about the firearm, which the officer never referred to as a “gun”. Over and over he explained how his primary purpose was to help people and keep people safe. He never spoke of “bad people”, but of poor choices and people who might be sick and need help.

At one point, a volunteer asked the officer, *“what is the most important tool you carry with you?”* he answered, *“****My words****. The way that I communicate is the most important way that I can help people in any circumstance. How we talk to each other is very, very important.”*

I was so impressed by this young man who carries such weighty responsibility in our community, and I found myself thanking God for such a sincere example of **Heart, Courage, Wisdom, Hope and Power** for our children to witness.

We are called to be witnesses to these good things in our communities and to raise them up against the negative examples we see on the nightly news. Jesus tells us we need to pay attention to what holds our attention. Where is our spiritual life pointing us? Where we give our time and money tells us much about where we place importance. Jesus points out that we have the skills to tell the weather by the signs in the sky. Are we also able to recognize where God is showing up in our daily living? God surprises us, and often God disrupts and rattles our sense of comfort. God pushes us so we will grow.[[1]](#footnote-1)

It’s likely there will always be division in this world in which we live. And we pray to have the knowledge of living and moving and having our being in the God that is nearby, not far away and present in all places and times in our lives. In that knowledge, we pray that we might know the peace that passes understanding, and the find **Heart, Courage, Wisdom, Hope and Power** to bring about, with God’s will, the Kingdom in our own time and place.

Amen.

1. IInspiration – Ashley Cameron. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)