

This is one of those gospel lessons that make you squirm. Jesus says, “Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!” And not only division between people in the community, but division right through our most intimate relationships, our families! Uffda! What is Jesus talking about?

I’ve talked here about scapegoating before. When a community is stressed and everyone is fighting with each other, we have a tendency to point our fingers and blame someone. When the company isn’t doing well, time to get rid of the CEO. When the sports team is losing, time to get rid of the coach. When the school is doing badly, fire the Superintendent! We still have a little tendency to scapegoat.

Ever since Jesus was the scapegoat for the religious people of his time, and since we know that Jesus rose from the dead, we’ve learned that God is on the side of the victims. Not on the side of those who point their fingers, but on the side of those who have been identified for the blame. And since the resurrection, culturally, we’ve been increasingly aware that scapegoating doesn’t really solve any problems. It just creates victims.

And when you look over thousands of years of human history, we’re in a unique time. We’ve become concerned about people who’ve been victimized or marginalized. In traditional human communities, no one was victimized, people got exactly what they deserved.

In a scapegoating situation, it's all against one. And so now, after two thousand years of living with the death and resurrection story, more and more, we are coming to realize that people who've been scapegoated, might not be to blame for our problems. And so, socially, we're not only suspicious about scapegoating, if there is a tendency to go in the direction of scapegoating, we often can't agree about who should be the scapegoat.

And so, exactly because of the crucifixion and resurrection story, scapegoating doesn't work like it used to. And more and more we see situations where it's all against all, rather than all against one. As Jesus talks about in our gospel lesson it's two against three, and three against two, and right through our families.

A couple stories this morning... I have two brothers and one sister. And we all have at least a couple kids. And in my family, we're pretty even divided between Republicans and Democrats. And remember the presidential election of 2000, between Bush and Gore? That year during Thanksgiving, the election was still somewhat up in the air...

Remember all that uncertainty? They were counting votes and chads in Florida, counting the absentee ballots, people were screaming about the legitimacy of the election. The whole country was hanging on less than a thousand votes, there were accusations of fraud, both parties were posturing and making their cases in front of

the supreme court. And the supreme court came down with a five to four, divided decision to suspend the vote recount in Florida. Remember all that history?

Well, right in the middle of all that, my family sat down for Thanksgiving at my older brother's house. And let me tell you, it was not a pleasant meal. There was a lot of father against son and son against father, and brother against sister, and so on and so forth. And believe me, it all came out.

We were not good examples for our sons and daughters, all the nieces and nephews who were hearing everything. There was a lot of things that shouldn't have been said. There was a lot of hurt feelings. And remarkably, both ways, it was an amazingly equal opportunity demeaning experience.

And I wonder, any other families, have a rather unpleasant Thanksgiving that year? It was almost twenty years ago! It sure felt like an all against all situation. Lots and lots of tension, and no agreement on who should be blamed or scapegoated.

When we're aware of the fact that we have a tendency to scapegoat, we try to resolve our differences in other ways. And it feels like the tension keeps escalating and never really resolving. These days, our politics seem more like all star wrestling, trying to body slam each other, rather than solve any problems.

Jesus says he came to bring fire to the earth... I wonder if this is what that fire looks like? It sure looks like an all against all situation to me...

Jesus also talks about a baptism, an immersion into human violence. An amazing feature of the crucifixion story is that everyone is guilty and at the same time no one is guilty. In other words, we are all invited into the story to wonder how we would have behaved if we had been there.

Violence, it seems, is the baptism Jesus is talking about. Perhaps it's violence then, that Jesus came to transform.

Violence in all the ways we talk to each other, violence in all the ways we treat each other and talk about each other. Jesus died at all the ways we point our fingers at others and accuse them of wrong doing. And it's exactly in seeing Jesus blood on our own hands that we repent of our own violent ways. And repentance does happen, instead of crucifying others to get what we want, we crucify ourselves in service to others.

Do you see how counter cultural that is? For transformation in our country and in our families to happen, we all need to start in our own hearts. We need to listen and love others who are different than ourselves. And this is the meaning of body of Christ. A place where we are all different, but united in love for God and one

another. This body of Christ is composed of democrats and republicans, who value each other, because we are stronger together, and for the sake of the world.

Believe me, recently, I've learned big time that things go much better with a left hand and a right hand.

The church has a unique role to play in our society and in our country. And believe me, this is the good news. We all belong to this amazing community. Which is fundamentally different than any other human organization out there.

Our reading from Jeremiah, warns us against false prophets. There is always a huge temptation to create God in our own image. We tend to think that God likes the same things we do, and the same people we do, and the same candidates we do... Democrats are tempted to think God is like them and prefers their way of thinking, and of course, same thing with the Republicans.

And when they think God loves one party more than another, they've created an idol, a God of their own making. This is fundamentally breaking the first commandment; thou shall not have any other Gods before me. God is not liberal or conservative; you see God is both. Churches that favor a particular political

view, lose sight of the whole body of Christ. We all need each other and especially in our differences.

This is one of the things I've come to appreciate about our churches. We are all neighbors, we are all different in how we see the world, and we are like one big family.

Now, to finish my story.... My own family has recovered from that election-year thanksgiving dinner. Not so much because we went through any reconciling intervention. But exactly because we're a family. Families are the place of our biggest disagreements; families are also the place of our deepest belonging and greatest support.

I have a Nephew getting married this week, and my whole family is going to move heaven and earth to get there. A herd of wild horses couldn't keep my mom and dad from being there. Jo and her husband are flying in from Seattle, Jon and Rachel are coming from Canada. There will be dancing and eating and shenanigans, and the family will celebrate getting one person bigger and stronger.

I've seen family squabbles, and I've also seen families be families amidst tremendous differences. There is a bond that is greater than conflicts. And so it is with the Christian church. We are all brothers and sisters. We are all different,

and we work hard at staying in relationship even when there are differences. Jesus is the unity, amidst all our differences; the glue that holds us together.

It is the love of God, demonstrated by Jesus and through the Holy Spirit that has made us brothers and sisters. We are a family in the body of Christ, and a sign of the Kingdom of God. Amen...