Rooted in Love: Love Requires Making Difficult Choices

Proper 15C || August 17, 2025 || 9:30am St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA || Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:1-2, 8-18; Hebrews 11:29-12:2; Luke 12:49-56 || The Reverend Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

We have been exploring the many facets of God's love this summer—a love that is deep enough to root us, strong enough to hold us, and bold enough to send us out. We have reflected on love that advocates, love that endures, love that is faith in action, and today's Gospel and scripture readings invite us to consider a facet of love that is not always comfortable: God's love requires choices. Choices between truth and fiction, between perseverance and giving up, between the comfort of peace and the cost of discipleship.

This morning's gospel from Luke offers us a fierce and unsettling tone. This is not the gentle, good Shepherd. This is Jesus aware that life is short, and offering an urgent warning that we have to choose. Choose God's kingdom values, base our actions and decisions on bringing about what is pleasing to God or allow the status quo to prevail.
We are forgiven if this Gospel is a headscratcher, or so unsettling that we want to dismiss it or ignore it as irrelevant (or perhaps TOO relevant) to reflect upon. Jesus' words in today's Gospel are jarring.
"Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!"

We are forgiven if we think - "ACK, I am surrounded by division, disruption and no peace. Thank you, but this isn't what I'm looking for right now, Jesus". Let's acknowledge that the divisions, disruptions and discombobulations that are upending our shared civic life, that fill our daily newsfeeds are ugly and corrosive, and feel rooted not in love, bur rather in political or, very sadly, in financial gain.

We are offered a daily diet of division—us against them, neighbor against neighbor, culture against culture, even truth against truth—where the goal is not the health of our democracy, the knitting of our social fabric, our shared civic life or the flourishing of neighborhoods and people, but rather the amassing of power, money, or control.

That is not the division, the love requiring difficult decisions that Jesus is describing. When Jesus talks about bringing fire and division, he is not talking about stoking resentment or engineering social fractures. He is speaking about the inevitable tension that arises when the Kingdom of God conflicts with the human nature distractions of this world, the pursuit of personal comforts and gains. Jesus knows that life is short and that his teachings will disrupt the comfortable order of things, and yet he persists, not because he delights in conflict, but because the truth of God's love will not align neatly with systems built on exploitation, fear, or injustice.

And he has experienced this division in his own family. Scripture tells us that while his mother Mary was with Jesus throughout his adulthood and his ministry, other family members were not. He lived the truth that his life's purpose divided his own family. The "division" Jesus names is the line drawn by our allegiance. Will we follow the values of God's Kingdom—truth, mercy, justice, generous self-giving love—or will we align ourselves with whatever is easiest, safest, or most profitable in the short term?

I know this is unsettling to hear and certainly to practice in the heat of this summer, but Jesus is reminding us that following him means that sooner or later we will find ourselves in situations where we must make difficult choices and that those choices will cost us something.

That cost might be relational. Jesus isn't endorsing a breakdown of our families. He is acknowledging that others may not understand or agree. The cost might be social. Choosing God's way might make you the odd one out in your workplace, or your social group. The cost might be your own comfort, speaking up when mistruths are spoken or spread. The cost might be financial. Acting justly, refusing to exploit others, insisting on fair wages or ethical practices—these choices can come with a price tag.

And yet, this is what love requires. Not love as a sentimental feeling, but love as a commitment to God's vision for the world.

Jesus is also really cranky with his listeners and with us when he chides us for knowing how to interpret the weather and not what he is doing in the world. He says "You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

Bleck – this is not the "be sweet" Jesus. He is telling the crowd—and telling us—that discernment is part of discipleship. We can read the weather, we can follow the stock market,

we can keep up with the Red Sox stats, but can we read the signs of what God is doing right now? Can we see where God's Kingdom is pressing in and where we are being invited to align ourselves with it?

We live in a moment when the loudest voices are not always the truest, and when speed often matters more than accuracy. Jesus calls us to slow down enough to see clearly, to discern deeply, and to choose deliberately. It takes effort to see where God's hands are at work in the world.

To be rooted in God's love in this moment is to refuse the familiar comfort of tribalism. It is to reject the false peace of avoiding hard conversations about race, poverty, violence, and inequality. It is to resist the fear-based narratives that tell us to hoard what we have because there isn't enough to go around.

Being rooted in love means we choose to see one another's humanity first—even when we disagree, even when our political convictions differ, even when we are tired of trying.

It means we speak truth, even when it's unpopular, and we do so with humility and compassion. It means that when we encounter real division—the kind that comes from standing for God's justice—we don't shrink back, but neither do we delight in the fight. Our aim is always to bear witness to Christ, whose love spans every human-made boundary.

The writer of Hebrews offers encouragement for exactly this kind of living. We are "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses"—those who endured hardship, who made difficult choices, who stayed faithful when it cost them everything.

They are cheering us on. Not toward a shallow peace, but toward the joy of the race run well—the joy of a life poured out for the sake of the Gospel. The love that roots us is not fragile. It can bear the weight of truth. It can survive the loss of popularity. It can even withstand the pain of division when that division is born of loyalty to God's Kingdom.

We do not face these challenging choices alone. We have this community that stands with us. We have our triune God at the ready to cheer and strengthen us. We have the saints who surround us whose lives are testaments to what comes from making difficult and Christ centered choices.

In the week ahead, let us discern where God's love is calling us to make difficult choices. Where might we be missing God's hand at work in the world, and what are we invited to do

with our love and time? Let us look past perhaps the loudest or angriest voices to find that still small voice that Jesus offers, even when grumpy, to guide us and our actions.

Jesus' words about division are not a threat; they are an invitation. An urgent invitation to live in such a way that our allegiance is unmistakable. An invitation to choose God's truth over mistruths, God's justice over every injustice, God's call to true and lasting peace, even as its breadth passes our understanding. The choices required to accept this invitation are not easy, and perhaps are not comfortable, yet, they are required of us as God's beloved, and definitely what the world needs in this challenging and breaking moment. Amen+