**Luke 12:49-56**

*Jesus grieves his coming suffering, recognising the conflict that will arise over his message, and challenging people to discern the true nature of the time they live in, in the same way that they interpret the weather.*

“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, 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?

The Gospel reading this week is a difficult one, a deeply uncomfortable one, but a very significant one. The key is in Jesus’ call to discern the times, which in the Gospel refers to the growing frustration with Rome’s rule over Israel, and the inevitable destruction that would result if the people choose to try and resist Rome (which is, of course, exactly what happened). The division that Jesus speaks about flows from our responses to the times we live in, whether we will do the work of discernment or not, and whether we will choose the way of God’s Reign – the way of the cross – or not. When justice is ignored, and the poor and vulnerable are oppressed, God is angered, and, as indicated in Isaiah’s prophecy, judgement is prophesied. The image of the well-tended vineyard that is allowed to be destroyed for failing to produce good fruit is a powerful metaphor for this judgement. In the face of such injustice, there will always be those who refuse to do the work of discerning the times that Jesus called for, and who will prophecy what is untrue, comfortable and expedient. However, there will also always be those who will repent, as in Psalm 80, and who will embrace the sacrifice and rejection that comes from speaking the truth, confronting injustice and working for a more compassionate, peaceful world. Unfortunately, there will always be division between truth speakers and truth deniers, between defenders of justice and defenders of the status quo. This is the cross we are called to carry.

**COCU52C Readings**

**GLOBAL APPLICATION**: The Gospel call of justice is bringing division to our world and even to the Church, as Jesus predicted it would. In the face of economic struggle, there are those who are eager to ‘prophesy’ prosperity, without the need to change the underlying systemic flaws that bring about inequality and injustice. Those who insist on pointing this out, are rejected and scoffed at. In the face of climate change, there are those who are eager to ‘prophesy’ that there is no problem, and that the world is to be destroyed by God anyway. But, those who insist on challenging oil companies, energy companies and government, those who insist on calling attention to the danger of our consumption, are scoffed at, questioned or ignored. There are many voices in our world that want to ‘prophesy’ lies – to ignore the signs of injustice, poverty, excessive consumption, and health care and education failure. And those who insist on proclaiming the Gospel message of repentance, justice and simplicity will need to embrace the cross, for they will not avoid it in the divisive responses that result. The big challenge we face is whether we are willing to embrace the suffering of living out the Gospel message that we preach, while also embracing the suffering of the mocking, accusations and rejection that will come from those who refuse to live differently or to acknowledge the brokenness of our economic, political, healthcare, education, immigration, security and justice systems.

**LOCAL APPLICATION**: Every Christ-following community and individual is faced, daily, with a choice. We can choose to adopt an ‘escapist’ faith, ignoring the pain of the world while waiting for heavenly bliss after we die, or we can do the work of listening, watching and understanding our societies and neighbourhoods, and the times in which we live. We can prophecy what is easy, comfortable and expedient for us – what requires little sacrifice and work, what makes us feel good, but changes little – or we can draw attention to the signs of injustice among us, we can call out corruption and exploitation, and we can hold ourselves and our leaders accountable to care for the marginalised and vulnerable. Ultimately, if we take the latter course, we will face the suffering of getting involved, for we will have to actually do something about the issues we expose. We will also, inevitably, face the aggression and threats of those who are invested in the status quo. We will find ourselves upsetting the peace, and being labelled “divisive”, “rabble-rousers” and other names. The question is whether we have the conviction and courage to follow the great cloud of witnesses in service of God’s reign, or not. This is a choice we will face every single day. *(Commentary, John van de Laar, Sacredise)*

**Psalm 80**

*A Psalm of repentance for abandoning God, and praying for God to once again tend and protect God’s people as a vineyard that is well cared for.*

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us!

**Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people’s prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.

**Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches; it sent out its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the River. Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it. Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted. They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down. May they perish at the rebuke of your countenance. But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself. Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name.

**Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

**Isaiah 5:1-7**
*A metaphorical prophecy of judgement against Israel and Judah, pictured as God’s vineyard, for their lack of justice.*

Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it, 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 waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briers and thorns; I will 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 pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!

**Hebrews 11:29 - 12:2**

*The “great cloud of witnesses” surround us - people of faith who stayed committed to God through great trial and heartache. They encourage us to stay firm, and follow Christ – the one who faithfully endured the cross.*

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 raging 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 our 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.