

Sunday, July 24, 2022 Pentecost 7 *“Life In the Time of Jesus”*

Luke 12: 49-56, Luke 15:1-7

For a number of years now our Summer Worship Series has been “At Your Request” and each spring the responses to this request always amaze me. This summer is no exception as each week our understanding of faith, church and God’s gift in Jesus will be shared in hopefully and prayerfully inspiring new ways so that you will be uplifted by the Spirit which moves amongst us.

This summer we will start with “Life in the Time of Jesus” and go through topics focused on the covenants God calls us to share to specific Bible stories of individuals we may not know well. These will lead us also to what “the church of the post pandemic, post Christian era” might mean as we focus on the future church of Jesus Christ. In many ways we are going back to the future as we seek foundational understanding of our relationships with God in the midst of His creation and learning how Jesus’ purposes continue to lead us into an ever changing world. But we are not alone in this journey of faith—God’s Spirit is ever present and for this we need to be grateful!

Our first topic is “Life in the time of Jesus”. What was life like in the time of Jesus? What was going on politically, in the cities and villages, and what were the key factors of every day life when Jesus came into the world. When Jesus was born, King Herod was in power and when foreign strangers asked about the newborn “king of the Jews”, he was threatened. What he had worked so hard to achieve- great wealth and power- could be taken away from this new king. Herod wanted him killed and decreed that all boys under 2 years would be put to death. Warned by God, Joseph fled with his family to live in Egypt. They stayed there until it was deemed safe to return to the land of Israel.

The two cultures of Roman rule and the Jewish population within the Holy Land collided most often leaving the Jewish people as the object of cruel and oppressive tactics at their rulers’ hands. They were the ones giving up more than needed to those in power in order to maintain peace. But, as the prophets had written generations before and they held in faith,

God's promised messiah would come. They believed that through the messiah, change would happen for all but they did not know how or when.

Roman rule in Judea had not been longstanding prior to Jesus' early years. However, this small country experienced clashes amongst the people based upon their place in society. Roman taxation was high for all people. Taxes were imposed on agricultural produce including grains, livestock and even from those praying in the Jerusalem temple as they offered sacrifices according to traditions. These taxes enabled Roman rulers to acquire great wealth and with it power. Most of the people's resistance to tax collectors was not based on economic issues, but focused on those collectors who cheated the people out of their money often taking more than needed and pocketing it for themselves. To the Jewish people, these elite tax collectors were viewed as having attained power without fulfilling the traditional Jewish requirements of good birth and/ or Torah learning. They had the status but did not have the integrity.

Jewish faith and culture taught also that it was the "teacher of Israel" who was to command respect more than any others. It was the teachers who attained a measure of authority and they were members of local councils and rulers of the synagogues. These were the people of wisdom and kept the moral compass of the community. It is these people who oversaw the communities and villages of the time of Jesus. The seeds of revolt included living under Roman rule, cheating tax collectors, and wealthy land owners seeking more power and money. These were the every day struggles of the Jewish people. The threat of losing land due to bad harvests as a result of droughts forced people to work diligently and long. The land was their means of survival and as they struggled to provide and live, they also looked to their faith in hope. They lived seeking this promised Messiah.

Communities were small with an average village being a few acres with 200-300 people. As the community grew, walls were built around the towns for safety and protection. Outside the village was where the market was located and enabled people to purchase the commodities they did not make themselves. The streets were dry and dirty and narrow. The stone walls would be built into the countryside and windows would be fairly small allowing only light and air in. The houses would have courtyards with people attending to their various tasks

from weaving, caring for the farm animals, grinding grain or preparing food. Towards the back of the houses were the bedrooms lit only by oil lamps. Most of the daily activities would be conducted outdoors either in the courtyard or on the roof. The rooves were made out of wooden beams (cypress or cedar), straw mats were laid on these and then a layer of clay was applied to keep out winter rains.

The people were agriculturalists- farmers of different types which grew grains of wheat and barley; they might have also owned small olive groves and vineyards were abundant. With the help of domesticated animals such as mules or donkeys, oxen and cows, the farmers' tasks could be completed. Chickens ran freely while goats were the source of milk. Sheep and goats were often kept in pens outside of the village with younger household members assigned to look after these key staples of life. There was no running water save the well shared by the villagers and of course there was no sewage system. Daily life was filled with hard labour and tasks were determined by what was needed to be done.

Shepherds and sheep are often mentioned in the New Testament as these animals were raised for wool and eventually food. The olive press was often a co-op in the village in order to obtain the oils so needed by everyone. Blacksmiths were important for the villagers as the metal was used in every aspect of life- weapons, household items, jewelry and coins. Carpenters were often seen as professional as they prepared doors, shutters, locks, agricultural tools and furniture. They had specific skills and shared them with villagers and they would be familiar with the needs of the people in the village. Farmers sold the grain to people and a daily task by women was to grind this into flour in order to produce daily bread.

In the village life was busy six days per week tending fields, flocks and the daily needs of families. Sabbath was observed in the synagogue as the place of assembly of both men and women with specific traditions and observances also taking place in the home. The synagogue was served as a school for boys with teachers' primarily focused on the Torah and correcting moral behaviours. Girls learned at home with their mothers. This was the cycle of learning. Special celebrations took place as children grew older and married or when people died or there were harvest feasts. Pilgrimages to the temple in Jerusalem would take place throughout

the year as faithful Jewish people observed the traditions of their faith and prayed together. In many ways, life was filled with daily tasks and routines just like it is today.

But the time was right for Jesus to live. He had been raised in the Jewish tradition and attending synagogue and learning with the teachers was a part of his education. As Jesus grew up he would have apprenticed in the carpenter's shop with Joseph. Then one Sabbath, Jesus was in Nazareth and he went into the synagogue. He stood up to read from Isaiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. " Those listening watched him attentively. Then he said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." This was the beginning of Jesus' ministry even though the people who heard him, did not think this was possible after all this was Joseph's son. This was the moment when things changed in the world. The people listening could not believe that Jesus was the promised one nor did they understand that the role of the messiah was not going to be against the Roman rule, but in how people lived.

What was Jesus purpose in coming to earth? As we read in Luke 12, Jesus came into the world was to divide people by getting people to think and open their minds beyond their everyday life. They knew how to watch the sky for clouds and wind but they did not understand what was happening to them at that time and how he was to teach them as he fulfilled God's promises. We who live almost 2000 years later, realize that Jesus came to save the world but not just for that time and generation but for all times. This means that Jesus came not for the time of Roman rule leading to its collapse; not just for the Jewish people, or Gentiles, and not just to teach. He came to save the lost the unknowing and those who were unsure of their life's focus. This purpose is still being fulfilled at this time because people of all ages are still wondering why we live and the purpose of life. People are seeking purpose for life itself and wondering why God created the universe and individual human beings at all. Jesus came to find those who are lost. Remember the man Legion who had many demons within? Jesus cast out those demons into swine but the man himself began to live with a purpose.

We too seek answers about life and those who were once lost are the ones still called to tell the next group of people about Jesus. It is up to us to tell the story of Jesus, in our time and generation; to make it make sense to the next generation as to why it is important to hear Jesus' story. Because his life, death and resurrection is not for one people in a certain time. Why did Jesus come to earth? To save all people from sin, death and to give to all the gift of forgiveness of hope and the promise of eternal life.

Life on earth at the time of Jesus still followed the cycles of the sun, moon, and Earth. Life included birth and death, and all the rites of passage in between. The circumstances of labour was different, education and connections were different but life still involved the spirit of God breathing into the people He created then just as God does now. People believed and had hope in God that their life would improve. Jesus brought this hope and taught about eternal life made possible by faith. Life still involves the coming of Jesus into our world—even now—for Jesus meets us here and now where we are because we matter to God—Father Son and Spirit. We matter just like the people in Jesus' time on earth. But they did not understand fully who he was and this is a huge difference from their life and ours.

We are people of the 21st century living in 2022 A.D. (Anno Domini). We are living at a time of the covid19 pandemic, where monkey pox is spreading, electric vehicles are pending for production, and where education may occur in person or through the internet. We are living in a time when the internet has the answers to everything and one company can close down the country in error. But we are also living in a time where there is still war with people killing each other with bombs and guns as leaders seek wealth and power. There are significant challenges affecting our Earth as climate change is real with extreme heat bringing about challenges to age old technology of railways. Medicine and health care has advanced enabling people to live longer and healthier lives. And what we have learned through the decades since Jesus lived on earth has enabled our life expectancy to double from that era. But what is the value of a long life if we do not live it with compassion and care for self and others? There are also people who need support, love, and care just like there were in Jesus' time. This is Jesus' message for all people and all generations. To love others and share compassion –to look for the lost and find them where they are. To help where needed.

Jesus still enters the lives of people- because his message still is relevant, uplifting and filled with hope. It is the message of love which transcends all times, places, cultures and histories. It is the message of God 's judgement on sinners as Jesus bears witness to the truth so that we can experience an abundant life on earth. Christ came to preach the good news to the poor in spirit, to healing those who have no or lost hope, and proclaim freedom and forgiveness so that eternal life is made possible. Christ came to enable all to see that we need God to help us clean up the mess of this earth because we are sinful. But we who believe and hear this message in 2022 must ask if Jesus is still relevant? Is his message important? If yes then what are we that is you and I doing to tell it to others? How are we living with hope and love for others and what role are you playing? Maybe we need to look for Jesus in our midst as we seek to love him and love others in His name. Let us pray.

God of grace we praise you for life and the gift of life for all who have lived before us. Through them we have been able to grow the building blocks of what we need to thrive in our time and generation. Yet what we seem to miss is the excitement and hope Jesus brings as he taught in the synagogue, healed people and shared his life for all to see. Hear us O God in these moments when questions arise, when answers lead to more questions and our faith becomes stronger. God we praise you for Jesus and thank you for fulfilling your promise to us in Christ as Saviour. Hear now our prayers and praise. Amen.