

The Fourteenth Sunday of Pentecost

August 25, 2013

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalm 71:1-6

Hebrews 12:18-29

Luke 13: 10-17

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I retired about a year ago. This past year has been one of changes and adjustments. One of the adjustments, probably the most difficult after all these years, has been that I don't celebrate every Sunday. Happy and I attend other churches, see other priests and deacons at work, and listen to other people's sermons. That part has been really interesting.

We recently were at a church where the priest began his sermon with the question "Why are we here?" A rhetorical question, apparently; I don't think he really expected an answer, which is good because nobody volunteered. So he listed a number of reasons: worship, healing, family tradition, fellowship, pure habit.

He did not say fear – fear of a demanding, vengeful, all-powerful God that would consign them to the flames. I'm not entirely unfamiliar with that thinking, which may be why, at age 13, I found the Episcopal Church and fell in love with it. That fear would not have been a very Episcopalian response, really should not be a Christian response, but is very biblical, Old Testament biblical; of course, you and I know there is only one God in the Old Testament and the New. The great

difference is in how people see God, how people said that God presents Himself.

The Old Testament God presents Himself with fire and smoke, whirlwinds and the blaring of trumpets. This not a God to get close to. Make a sacrifice and keep him happy. This is a God of power and majesty, remote and mysterious. This is a God that is likened to a computer: all rules and no forgiveness. Even a cursory reading of much of the Old Testament will tell you that that is a fair description of the state of the world in that historical age, a dangerous, treacherous world in which the very strong were honored. In much of today's world, that is still true.

Actually, Jesus was born into that world.

The God of the New Testament presents Himself in Jesus, a human being among human beings, living a human life but different. In Jesus, God speaks of such things as charity and compassion and love. That is new. In Jesus, God finally sacrifices Himself in an ultimate act of love. In Jesus, God challenges the rules with which the world has surrounded Him, barriers the world has erected.

In the Gospel this morning, we read about a collision of the thinking of the people of two testaments, those two ideas of God. "Come back some other time," say the Temple regulars; the rule says that there is no work on the Sabbath, and that includes acts of healing and compassion. That's the rule. Break the rules and we're all in trouble.

Jesus lives in a New Testament world; He breaks rules. Jesus proclaims that love and compassion must come first. That is God's will. Jesus proclaims that God wants not to punish, but to forgive; not to harm, but to heal. Therein lies the division, the break. It's a new age, a new understanding, a new world.

It's important to remember that. In this reading from Luke all the critics of Jesus are of the Old Testament. They are in church, in the Temple, to avert disaster, to appease God.

Those who follow Jesus are of a new age. We are in church to celebrate and to give thanks. We have received a promise, not a threat, a promise of God's sacrificial, unqualified love for His people, given to us in Jesus.

In His Holy Name.