

Sermon for Pentecost X Year C 2025

If someone asked you, “Why did Jesus come into the world?”  
how would you answer?

I’m sure most of us would offer some version of John 3:16—

*For God so loved the world . . .*

I’m fairly certain no one would answer by quoting what Jesus says about himself in today’s gospel—

*I came to bring fire to the earth . . .*

*I have not come to bring peace, but division.*

And perhaps we are all nodding and saying . . . we don’t need division,  
we need peace.

We already are dealing with global warming,  
so, no thank you, Lord for the fire.

I recently heard a speaker at a Christian gathering say,

“I am glad this country is polarized.

I wish it were more polarized.”

The remark sent shock waves through the audience.

I don’t doubt that the remarks Jesus made in today’s gospel had much  
the same effect.

We usually view polarization, division and dissension as harmful and  
destructive.

Many times, they are.

We can probably all recall living through family rifts, church conflicts  
and political upheavals that disrupted the efforts of communities to  
pursue the common good, led churches to disband,

ended friendships, and alienated family members from one another.

There is no question that polarization is destructive and contrary to  
God’s mission of reconciling the world to God’s self.

That said, there is something worse than polarization and conflict.

Far worse than open conflict is a false peace—

A false peace that was offered by prophets, preachers, and demagogues who – in the words of the prophet Jeremiah—*treat the wound of God's people carelessly, saying, "peace, peace," when there is no peace.*

Using religion and faith as a kind of opiate, to dull the senses with comforting lies, causing the people to remain silent against cruelty and injustice, all for the sake of avoiding conflict—

To create a people who don't and won't disturb the peace in order to speak a hard truth to reveal hidden evil.

Not wanting to disturb the peace so often perpetuates evil.

Our wounded world cannot be healed with soothing words assuring it that all is well, no repentance (or change) is required,

and the status quo is the way things are and should always be.

Such peace is no peace at all.

It is poles apart from the peace God wills for us.

In order for the peace of God to reign,

peace that follows justice,

repentance and reconciliation in just that order,

the false peace resting on the appeasement of evil,

toleration of injustice,

and blindness to the suffering and persecution

of our neighbors must be shattered.

We must disturb the false peace

in order for the peace of God's reign to enter in.

It seems that the work of a disciple of Jesus in days such as these is to be a disturber of the peace.

Because—just as John of Patmos the author of the letter we call

Revelation wrote—we cannot be neutral or lukewarm to tyrants and the oppression they bring, especially on the vulnerable.

There is no middle ground between equality and racism and misogyny, between truth and lies, between the peace of God's reign over a new creation and the fragile peace of despots and their subjects desperately trying to hold onto the crumbling remnants of the old.

Standing with Jesus sometimes means standing against the opinions and actions of even the people we love.

Consider the following story about a man named Clarence Jordan who was part of the funding of Koinonia Farm in Georgia back in 1942. It was founded to bear witness to the church as a family in which there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. Koinonia was a place where African-Americans lived side by side with their white sisters and brothers. So it will come as no surprise to hear that Koinonia Farm was a frequent target of racist hostility and even government initiated opposition.

Shortly after Koinonia was founded, Georgia's state attorney general made several attempts to outlaw the community, confiscate its property and evict the residents.

Clarence Jordan sought the help of his brother, Robert, a prominent lawyer with political aspirations.

Clarence asked Robert to take on the defense of Koinonia Farm.

According to a written account from a book by James McClendon, the following exchange between brothers took place:

*"Clarence, I can't [represent you]. You know my political aspirations. Why, if I represented you, I might lose my job, my house, everything I've got."*

*"We might lose everything too, Bob," [Clarence replied.]*

*"It's different for you."*

*"Why is it different? I remember, it seems to me, that you and I joined the church the same Sunday, as boys. I expect when we came forward the preacher asked me about the same question he did you. He asked me, 'Do you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.' And I said, 'Yes.' What did you say?"*

*"I follow Jesus, Clarence, up to a point."*

*"Could that point by any chance be—the cross?"*

*"That's right, [Clarence]. I follow him to the cross, but not on the cross. I'm not getting myself crucified."*

*“Then, [Robert,] I don’t believe you’re a disciple. You’re an admirer of Jesus, but not a disciple. I think you ought to go back to the church you belong to, and tell them you’re an admirer and not a disciple.”*

*“Well now, [Robert replied,] if everyone who felt like I do did that, we wouldn’t have a church, would we?”*

*“The question is” Clarence said, ‘Do you have a church?’”*

Do we have a church, are we a disciple, if we are only admirer’s of Jesus and we don’t take up the cross?

This is true in small ways and big ways.

In the way we face personal tragedies as well as political tragedies.

We need to understand that proclaiming the gospel is not just a matter of preaching or reciting bible verses, but it is a way of practicing the way Jesus lived—showing mercy, granting protection and care to every sinner who has fallen short of the glory of God

(and who does that leave out?)

Discipleship requires no less than caring for our neighbors who are transgender, undocumented or victims of political censorship.

This requires a bit of disturbing of the peace.

And it may bring division as we stand with and for those who stand against the ones Jesus loved enough to die for.

When faced with the choice between avoiding the fire and enduring it, Jesus chose to pass through it, especially because he knows that this is the best and only way to reach us.

It is important to keep our eyes and ears tuned to Jesus and his voice so that with the great cloud of witnesses—past and present and future—we can walk the walk and not just talk the talk.

For this Jesus came into the world.

Thanks be to God.