

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Aug 14th 2016

Ok, I can admit it... I belong to three bookclubs. While it goes without saying that I have a love of reading, I also appreciate the rich friendships that have developed through my time with these clubs.

The hot August days in our part of the world remind me of when I developed my love of reading as a young girl. I would head off on my bike to the local Carnegie library and check out as many books as the baskets on the back of my bike could hold. The quiet time in the library was a welcome change from other summer activities such as using that same bike to give my sisters rides to the pool.

I remember a teacher pointing out the conflict in a story and explaining how conflict is necessary for the narrative to be interesting. It took me a while to appreciate that perspective as I struggled with how conflict could be helpful.

As I pray with the readings for today I must say that struggle comes to mind. I am so much more comfortable with my image of Jesus as peacemaker. In today's gospel from Luke Jesus proclaims that he "has come to set the earth on fire, and how he wishes it were already blazing." I am excited by the passion but then I wonder what Jesus is saying when he states: "Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." I was searching to find meaning in these words from Jesus.

Fortunately I had the opportunity to participate in an Interfaith Solidarity Service. Praying and singing and mourning loss of life of those who have died violent deaths with members of the community brought the words of Jesus into focus for me. We are divided. Our identities and values and lifestyles and choices drive us apart. But when we are called to guide our lives by God's teaching everything falls into place.

During the Solidarity Service we were called to be more engaged members of the community. The first reading from Jeremiah shares a powerful story of advocacy. A court official Ebed-melech speaks truth to power when he tells King Zedekiah of the way the men have mistreated Jeremiah. The king heard this advocacy and ordered Jeremiah removed from the cistern before he could die. I ask for God to give me strength and courage and awareness of the times I can serve as an advocate for those who need my support. I can advocate for those trapped in systemic racism and poverty by working with business leaders and government officials. I can also listen for moments to advocate for someone who is being mistreated at work, a disenfranchised family member or a neighbor who is misunderstood. I pray for God to help my advocacy be respectful and meaningful as I have seen some advocates go too far.

Today's second reading from Hebrews reminds us of the power of the witness. Standing with someone and bearing witness is true solidarity. Surrounded by witnesses we can: "rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus." I hear Jesus telling me that I need to attend to the tension that develops when I begin to lead a disordered life. If my choices are driven by my ego, acquiring more possessions, or ignoring those in need I fall into sin. Getting selfishly wrapped up on my own life and not taking the time to be present to others and their needs is sin. I pray for the grace to be witness for others and to appreciate those who are witnesses for me. I am inspired to be a community companion and to work to end division by striving to hear God's calling and to meet people where they are.

What a wonderful topic for my next bookclub gathering!

Mary Lee Brock-Creighton University's Werner Institute