

Cracked  
Luke 12:49-56

“The eight toughest verses in Luke”! That how one commentary put it! These are hard words . . . contradictory words.

A few years ago I was invited to sit in on a few meetings of an Alcoholics Anonymous group. What I first noticed was the wide variety of people at the meeting . . . blokes in suit and tie . . . old men . . . young women . . . mums . . . a genuinely broad cross-section of society. A bit like a church in a way. But, what I noticed most . . . what I was most *impacted* by, was the bravery . . . the raw vulnerability and honesty . . . about the brokenness . . . the openness of those who spoke. As I sat and listened I had this strange thought . . . and feeling . . . I thought: “These are my people”. That’s how it felt: I belong here.

Which was odd to me . . . because I am not an alcoholic.

And, then I thought, “I wish my church was more like this”. What an odd thing to wish for.

We in the church talk a lot about brokenness . . . about sinfulness . . . but we do so in a way that’s much more anonymous even than an AA meeting . . . and we do so wearing our Sunday best . . . our Sunday best clothes . . . our Sunday best face . . . and we leave none the wiser to the brokenness of the person in the next pew and they none the wiser to ours. It seems that’s how we want it . . . paper over the cracks . . . keep them hidden . . . it’s less fuss that way . . . it keeps the peace.

Peace is good isn’t it? Isn’t that what we all hope for . . . what we all wish for . . . and, if we’re a contestant in a Miss Universe contest we vow to work for: peace! But then we come up against Jesus . . . the Prince of Peace . . . who says in his contradictory way: “Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division”!

It makes me wonder whether our idea of peace is not what Jesus is on about . . . whether we often confuse peace with simply maintaining the status quo . . . and the status quo is all about power . . . and it works for those who have the power . . . so, it comes down to looking after number one . . . me . . . as long as I am not being bothered . . . as long as I’m not put out . . . as long as life isn’t too hard for me . . . then peace is working.

The same goes for any group that holds the power . . . even the church. And, so, peace always comes at a cost . . . there’s always a price to pay in maintaining the status quo . . . and usually the price is paid by those who don’t fit in . . . those who are different . . . those who make us uncomfortable . . . those who don’t hold the power . . . who are then excluded . . . excluded from my life . . . excluded from the life of the community . . . but at least we have peace, right?!

In Jesus’ time there was that sort of peace . . . it was famously called the *Pax Romana* . . . the Roman Peace . . . and Rome worked hard to maintain that peace . . . because it was good for Rome . . . it kept Rome in power . . . but it was peace won and maintained at the end of a sword and a spear. There was

no way that Rome could afford to show any weakness . . . any vulnerability . . . any brokenness . . . to do that would spell disaster.

But, Jesus is not interested in that sort of peace . . . the sort of peace that simply transfers self-centred power . . . which, in the end is just shuffling the deckchairs on the Titanic!

So, Jesus' mission is to bring peace . . . but peace between God and us . . . between God and human beings . . . that's the relationship that most needs fixing . . . that's the relationship none of us can repair . . . because we can't . . . we won't . . . give up our power. So, deep down God is a threat to us . . . to our self-centred peace . . . God's power is a threat to our power . . . to our need to be in control . . . and if we can just keep God in check . . . if we can just maintain the status quo . . . then all is well!

So, to bring peace between God and us Jesus has to be contradictory . . . he turns over the apple cart . . . he upsets our whole idealized system of peace . . . he challenges our status quo. He points out our flaws, our weaknesses . . . our sin . . . our brokenness.

And, there's a price to pay for that . . . there's always a price to pay. But, this price is not paid by us . . . not by us who so desperately want to hang on to whatever little power we have . . . it's God who pays the price . . . it's God's power that pays the price . . . and God's control . . . for this is Jesus' mission: God giving up power . . . God giving up control . . . God becoming weak . . . God becoming vulnerable . . . God knowing what it's like to be stressed . . . to be harassed . . . to be shamed . . . to be powerless. It's for this that Jesus goes to the cross. This is the baptism Jesus is baptized with . . . a baptism of fire . . . and pain . . . and death . . . God dead on the cross . . . because just shuffling the deck chairs doesn't actually change anything!

Peace . . . with God . . . not earned by us . . . not at the point of a sword . . . not through power . . . but by love. God's love . . . given unselfishly . . . given painfully . . . given in weakness. There's a rawness in that sort of love . . . in that sort of relationship . . . an honesty . . . a vulnerability . . . that make sit possible to admit to our own brokenness before God . . . that then makes us compassionate towards the humanness of others . . . that then makes it possible to live in peace with others . . . without fear . . . without jealousy . . . without power.

For those who want to hang on to power . . . for those who need to maintain the status quo, this makes no sense . . . Jesus' kind of peace is disruptive and divisive and dangerous. But, if you have ever known what it's like to be vulnerable . . . and powerless . . . and ashamed. If you've ever felt excluded . . . and different . . . if you've ever been an outsider, this might just make sense to you. I think Jesus was serious when he said: "Blessed are the poor . . . blessed are the hungry . . . blessed are those who weep . . . blessed are you when people exclude you . . . blessed are you in your brokenness . . . for yours is the kingdom of God . . . yours is God's peace."

We come in our Sunday best . . . with our Sunday smiles . . . maybe not quite ready to share our brokenness too openly yet . . . and maybe that's ok . . . God knows our vulnerabilities . . . God knows our pain . . . God knows our shame . . . and God says to you: "Hi, my name is Jesus . . . I'm broken too . . . come join me . . . at a meal of brokenness . . . let me share my brokenness with you . . . let me give my brokenness to you . . . come receive *my* peace . . . my peace for broken people."

I can't help but think of a verse in the song *Anthem* by the late, great Leonard Cohen. He sings:

Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There's a crack, a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in.

Peace be with you.

Amen.

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