

Proper 15, Year C
August 17, 2025

*Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul;
and why are you so disquieted within me?*

I'm praying for rain, thinking about bushes and trees and vegetables I have planted, that St Thomas/Grace has planted, worrying if they will survive; thinking about the endless miles of scorched Vermont farmland in desperate need of water, of the farmers who cultivate, plant, nurture as they watch life deteriorating to dust. I'm praying for the goats and horses, cattle and sheep, grazing on that scorched foliage, the birds of the air, the fish in rivers and streams – all trying their best to survive the excessive heat and August sun. But the rain doesn't come and the forecast is not promising.

I've just heard of a colleague who died suddenly and unexpectedly in the cardiac unit of a hospital in Maine this past Tuesday evening, as his wife held his hand and spoke the Lord's Prayer to bless his journey home. In her note informing us, the loneliness of today cut through any words of hope in the resurrection she will try to reach for tomorrow.

Overwhelmed by the hopelessness being experienced around the world, I find myself turning inward. Most often, I try my best to look elsewhere for the pain and grief of those far, far away and it pulls me out of myself: after all, no matter how helpless or wounded I feel, there are so many far worse off. For some reason, this is not working lately, and I'm thinking perhaps the companionship of dying plants and confused wildlife I see whenever I look out my window or walk through the yard or around the neighborhood is making escape from my despair difficult.

I mentioned in passing the other week the Period of Enlightenment, often dated from 1685 to 1815. To drastically over-simplify, it was a time of awakening and awareness of the seemingly boundless capacity of the human mind - government, philosophy, art, music, religion - all became roads leading to yet unimagined discovery: reason, individual freedoms, questioning established institutions – all finally realized by the superb complexity of the human mind. Liberty and justice for all. The seeds for much that has happened in civilization and culture since that time were sown. And yet, I believe it was also the time when wisdom became the domain of the human mind to the exclusion of God; God was simply another particle of human discovery and understanding rather than a source of life and knowledge. That so often means when

mankind fails, God fails, but when man triumphs, it is to man's credit in spite of a god. Having said all that, I do not for a minute wish to diminish the amazing accomplishments of the Period of Enlightenment – a time when humanity passed through one of many coming-of-age gates into an exciting moment of self-discovery and profound understanding of his surroundings – reminiscent of a child's shaking off parental authority. But as so often we see happen in history, great accomplishments-unleashed have the power to destroy as well as to create, to break down as well as to build up.

Our Gospel for the day begins "I came to bring fire to the earth!" just as our reading from Jeremiah ends "is not my word like fire?" In this season of parched fields and meadows, drying streams and lowering shorelines, approaching hurricanes, are we not the hypocrites who can interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but cannot interpret the times? We are hearing with our own ears and seeing with our own eyes the prophets who are making us forget God's name as they prophesy lies, even deceiving themselves with the untruths they seek to establish as truth. All of us, religious or otherwise, are watching the moral behavior that has guided mankind since the beginning of time - those things for which we stand - smashed, devalued, belittled, mocked, evaporating - and we are implicitly being asked daily to join that throng of destruction.

I think I can safely say that when Jesus declares he came to bring fire into the world, he's talking about the End of Time, the Day of Judgment when we will each be asked to account for our actions. Jesus' talk of division not peace, his stress over his impending baptism by fire, make me wonder if he has just come from a conversation with his heavenly father in which God has revealed to Jesus the difficult tasks which face him - the reason for his coming to live as one of us on earth: these are the things you must do, these are the things you must tell them. Throughout scripture, Jesus invites us to answer God's call to be his children by adoption – inviting, not coercing, as Walter Brueggemann might say. But on this particular occasion, Jesus is pointedly asking us the hard question: who or what are you going to choose to follow and why? Who or what are you going to choose not to follow and why? Is this an either/or decision? Is this a binding decision, a life-long commitment? What if I change my mind?

Why are you so full of heaviness, o my soul; and why are you so disquieted within me? Put your trust in God; for I will yet give thanks to him who is the help of my countenance, and my God.