

Sermon for August 17, 2025
Given by The Reverend Theo Robinson
Isaiah 5:1-7; Hebrews 11:29-12:2; Luke 12:49-56
“Our Next Chapter”

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Well, today's readings are fun, aren't they? There's the writer of Isaiah singing a mournful song to an unfruitful vineyard. The letter to the Hebrews speaking about the difficulties of following Christ and the elusiveness of faith. And Luke is talking about Jesus causing division rather than peace and how families and households will be torn apart. These are pretty severe readings, ones that probably make you upset when you hear them. What a great selection to start off my preaching ministry here at St. Peter's. Sheesh! That said, I think there are some nuggets in here that we can lean on as we head into our ministry together, especially considering all of the change that St. Peter's has had to face recently.

We know that Jesus was a disrupter. He fought against the Romans and wanted change for a better life for his followers. He tossed tables. He changed peoples' lives just by walking into those lives. Jesus was a disrupter. But he was also supposed to be a bringer of peace. He was supposed to be the one to join the world in unity. So why are we talking about division and disunity? Is this the same Jesus? We don't want to think of Jesus as a bringer of division, but there is some truth there.

When you think back on the last few years here at St. Peter's, I could probably guarantee that there wasn't 100% agreement 100% of the time. We'd be kidding ourselves if we thought that. I think the point Jesus is trying to make is that there isn't anything wrong with disagreement. Jesus is telling us that we are called to the work of discerning, of arguing, of bringing our varied places of experience and individual truths to the table, so that we can work towards peace, unity, and the future of St. Peter's place in the world in relationship with one another.

While the words in today's Gospel are hard to hear, the message we can take away is that if we work hard at it, peace and unity will come. And it is our faith that will move us towards that day through grace with one another. Grace with each other as we learn how to work together, learn how to worship together, and learn how to be at peace with one another. Through all of this, one of the things that we will have to manage during yet another time of transition for St. Peter's, and for me, is expectation, which is a theme I see running through our readings today.

We're all familiar with the anguish of unmet expectations. We've done everything right, but nothing is going as we planned. In Isaiah, the gardener is trying to figure out what happened to his vineyard. He was expecting grapes in order to make wine, and he got nothing but rotten grapes, even though he did everything right in caring for his vineyard. The gardener's expectation of a full harvest of grapes wasn't met and now he's asking why. We know that feeling. We all know that even if we follow every proper step, sometimes the unexpected happens. And often we don't see it coming because it's not like we can see into the future.

Luke also talks about how things don't always happen as we expect them to. When we see clouds in the sky, we expect rain. But does it always rain? We feel hot winds, so we expect a scorching heat. But is that always the case? We expect Jesus to bring peace, and yet he talks about bringing division. So, what can we do about our expectations, and the knowledge that sometimes our expectations fall short of reality? Let's turn to the reading from Hebrews. Perhaps there are some answers there.

The letter to the Hebrews tells us what we know in our hearts as Christians. That we can look to Jesus for strength and for perseverance through anything that we are going through, including disagreements, transitions, and expectations, met and unmet. And we can be reassured that God walks with us through our entire faith journey. This knowledge is something important that we need to hold on to.

At the end of July, I turned the page on the previous chapter of my faith journey. A leap of faith that was taken almost a year ago has come to fruition with me standing here before you. Having left everything I know behind,

including my family, nothing has gone as expected since I left Winnipeg at the beginning of the month. But in situations like this, I can find support when I surround myself in a community of faith, with people of faith. When you are surrounded by a living cloud of witnesses to Jesus, you can't help but feel uplifted and not alone.

Now that I am here, the work has begun, and we will be turning the page on our next chapter together. Sure, there will be bumps in the road, disagreements, and unexpected events. But no matter what, we are in it together, our faith in Jesus will keep us strong, and God will be walking with us every step of the way.

I want to leave you with two questions to ponder as you leave this place. I hope they spark conversation amongst us all.

- 1) What are your hopes for our ministry together?
- 2) How do you think God will speak through this church to share the gospel?

I think it's important for us to share how we each hear God speaking to us, even if it's not in the same way that other people hear it. It will help us to understand each other's hopes and dreams for this congregation as we start our new chapter together. As we take these first steps together in our faith journeys, I pray that God's love and mercy will uphold us all by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.