

14 August 2022: Luke 12:49-56; Jeremiah 23:23-29 (Proper 15)

There was once an orphaned lion cub adopted by goats. The cub was taught by the goats to speak their language, eat their food, and copy their ways. One day a Great Lion came along, and when all the goats scattered in fear, the lion cub stood alone before the Great Lion. The Great Lion roared, *“What is this unseemly masquerade?”* The cub bleated nervously, nibbling the grass. The Great Lion picked up the cub and carried her to a pool of water. The Great Lion forced her to look at their reflections side by side. The cub saw her own small face, and the great face very much like it; but did not know what this meant. Then the Great Lion put meat before her, which she tentatively tasted. She felt her blood warm, and the truth dawned. Digging her claws into the ground, the lion cub raised her head and roared.

Sometimes we are not what we are created to be; indeed, we embrace the delusion NOT to be who we truly are. This is a Biblical truth: the story of Adam and Eve is everyone’s story. We are created to love and serve God, to love and serve one another, but each chooses to serve him/herself as a god, and therefore we reject the relationship with God, one another, and ourselves for which we are created.

If we could only be goats, all would be well. But it is impossible. We persist in grazing, without satisfaction. We bleat, but we really want to roar. We busy ourselves with goat-business, stare at goat-TV, alter our moods with goat-substances. We rationalize that being a goat is less stressful and safer. We try to be well-adjusted, socially acceptable, domesticated goats. But there is no joy, no courage, no hope; there is just straw.

“What has straw in common with wheat? says the Lord. Is not my word like fire, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?” (Jeremiah 23:29). *“Do you think that I have come to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!”* (Luke 12:50).

What refreshing images! We can pretend Jesus is not a Lion. Jesus meek and mild, saving our souls but making no demands, leading us only where *we* want to go, calling us to serve only as is convenient: giving comfort to the comfortable. Yes, Jesus loves us, saves us, is leading the lost, and comforting the distraught. Yes, Jesus longs to give us peace, but not the world’s peace, not a reasonable, tame, cheap peace, not a peace that costs others and not ourselves. Christ’s peace passes understanding because only when we let go of our self-deceit and play-acting, our useless reliance on our props and idols, do we even begin to be ready for such peace. When we finally reject counterfeit peace—that desolating state of knowing only God can give us what we desperately need—then we are small enough to be filled with God’s peace.

Like the lion cub in the story, we must look at ourselves and at the Great Lion. The terrible, wrenching joy of being a Christian is seeing our own reflection side-by-side with Jesus. Jesus, in his humanity, is what human beings really look like, what we are created to be. If we look long enough at Jesus, we will see the stark contrast between being human in our image and human in God’s image. And we will know one of these images is a fraud. Either we will try to crucify the Lion, or we will at least risk the crucifixion of our own distorted image. Goats cannot roar; claws do not grow on cloven hooves.

The reality of Jesus, which is only clumsily hinted at in words, symbols and song, is that in Jesus of Nazareth there is power to turn goats into Lions; to give life to the half-alive, even to the dead; that when Jesus says, “follow me”, “take up your cross”, “lose your life and find it”, he invites us to live in his power, not ours; according to his will, not ours. And Jesus promises that he will convert us into his image and likeness. Why else would we call him Christ and Lord and Savior; Son of God and Son of Man; the Lamb of God, and the Lion of Judah (cf. Revelation 5:1ff)?

Jesus calls us to daily throw our goat-hood into the fire of God’s love; to go with haste to the sculptor’s hammer for transformation from straw into the beauty of God. It is simple. Pray every day and often: “Jesus, I give you what I think I am, convert me into what you have made me to be. Not my will, but your will be done in me today, Lord Jesus Christ.”

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creations, now and for ever. Amen.