

## “Division Rather Than Peace”

Luke 12:49-56

Have you ever noticed how many warning signs you pass by in the average day? Signs like, “Do Not Enter,” “School Crossing,” “Caution, Wet Floor.”

There’s a hilarious warning circulating on the Internet (You know that everything you read on the Internet is true, don’t you?). Anyway, this warning says, “Do Not Shampoo Your Hair in the shower!” It’s so good to finally get a health warning that is useful. It involves the shampoo when it runs down your body while you shower with it. I don’t know why I never figured this out before. I use shampoo in the shower and when I do it runs down my body, but printed very clearly on the label is this, “For Extra Body and Volume!” No wonder I’ve been gaining weight.

So, I got rid of that shampoo and now I’m showering with Dawn dish soap. It’s label reads, “Dissolves Fat That is Otherwise Difficult to Remove. Problem solved! If you call me and I don’t answer, I’m in the shower.

For the first 45 verses of this 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke Jesus has been trying to quiet the anxiety of His followers. Remember last week how He was calling us His “**Little Flock,**” or “**His dearest friends?**” All of a sudden, out of nowhere, Jesus seems to turn on this large crowd gathered in Galilee. It’s not mentioned if one of the disciples had asked a dumb question which they were prone to do or if someone in the crowd has upset Jesus somehow but beginning with our 49<sup>th</sup> verse Jesus’ words are not easy to hear and maybe a little difficult to understand, even going so far as to call those in the crowd hypocrites.

He starts off talking about a “**Fire on earth!**” The people in Jesus’ audience would have thought about “fire” in a different way than we think of it now. When we think of fire we think of destruction and loss. When we think of fire, we hear fire alarms and sirens. For them many would have cooked their meals over an open fire—it would have been fire or torches that would have lit up the night. I’m reminded of the movie “Cast Away” and how thrilled Tom Hanks was when he created fire. For the people in Jesus’ time fire would have been a means of survival.

Fire has the power to destroy as well as refine and purge. A blacksmith uses fire to shape shoes for horses—he also uses fire to heat up iron to cauterize wounds. Farmers use fire to burn off

the weeds from their pastures—and when they do the grass that returns is greener than it ever was before.

In the days of the westward expansion in North America, when men saw that a prairie fire was coming, what would they do? There was no way for them to outrun it or guess the safe route out. The pioneers took a match, burned the grass in a designated area around them, and then they would take their stand in the burned area and be safe from the threatening fire. As the flames approached, they didn't have to be afraid because the fire had already passed over the place where they stood.

What does it mean for Jesus to bring fire upon the earth? It seems to refer to strife and division. John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance and said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire—a fire that would burn up the chaff with an unquenchable fire.

Jesus longed for the beginning of the purifying work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers—which would come after the Crucifixion and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. So, this baptism that Jesus speaks of here would indicate His death.

There is division and evidence of splintered families all around us. A cartoon strip once showed a young woman talking to her minister. She said, “John and I are having a terrible time, and we need your advice. We are trying to decide how to divide the furniture, who gets what of the money we've saved and who gets custody of the children.”

“Oh,” the minister asked, “are you contemplating divorce?” “Oh, no,” she replied. “We are trying to work out our prenuptial agreement.”

I heard about a campus minister who led a young man to Christ. The young man was Chinese and the Sunday that he made his confession of faith the minister baptized him. After the service, the minister got his camera and had some pictures taken at the baptismal font with the new Christian convert, but he couldn't help but notice the young man didn't seem to be all that pleased about the picture session. One of the young man's friends later told the minister that he wasn't excited about the pictures because they could never be seen. He had been told by his family that if he converted to Christianity he could never come home again; that there were people where he lived that would physically assault him for becoming a Christian.

The Christian who faithfully bears witness to Christ can be the victim of an inescapable amount of misunderstanding and hostility, no matter how gentle and tactful they may be, and in some periods and crises they will face actual persecution.

In our text this morning Jesus is spelling out the division which can occur in the home where some choose to follow Christ and others refuse to do so. He illustrates by citing the example of a family of five that will be divided three against two.

Finally, Jesus speaks of not being able to read the signs. I went to New Orleans about a month after Hurricane Katrina to assist in the clean-up effort and what I saw there is unexplainable. As we were mucking out the first house we worked on I was in conversation with the family that lived there. I asked them if everyone in their neighborhood had evacuated as they had. They said no—some couldn't afford to leave, some didn't have the means to leave, and some didn't know they were going to be in danger. I commented that I sat in my living room in Georgia watching the weather channel and the news and I knew what was going to happen but the people there didn't know or refused to be told what was about to happen. Now in their defense it wasn't Katrina that did the majority of the damage but the results and the breaching of the levies around town. Maybe they had heard similar warnings in the past and nothing ever happened (like calling for snow here in Georgia), but for whatever reason many decided that they would be perfectly fine and stuck it out, they refused to pay attention to the signs.

Jesus said: **“You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?”** What Jesus is telling them was the Kingdom of God was at hand—was present—was standing right in front of them—but they didn't recognize it. Just like the people in New Orleans failed to recognize the signs and warnings because it meant there would be hardships. Even the disciples failed to see until after the resurrection and the “fire” of Pentecost that anointed them. The Kingdom of God is still at hand. Are we any different from the disciples back then—do we recognize it?

We need this fire that Jesus promises! We need the fire that shapes us—molds us—speaks to us—directs us—and lights our path. In this year of 2022 when there are people and institutions out there that want to strip us of our religion, strip us of our faith—we need to be the saints that others can look to! We need to have that fire in our hearts—in our bellies—and in our very souls! We need to support each other in difficult times—let our prayers expand beyond the scope of only our concerns and needs—have an eye trained to spot the one in need—be practicing forgiveness—and always be open to whatever new thing God might be doing!

Jesus said: **“I have come to bring fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!”** There is no escaping the judgment and division that has come since Jesus' suffering on the cross. There is only one safe place to stand and that is where the match of God's judgment has struck: At the foot of the cross.

There was once an old man who had a little spotted dog. The dog was a mixture of spaniel, collie, terrier, and dachshund. He was a street-bred mutt, but the old man loved him because he was all he had. They were constant companions, going everywhere and doing everything together. Every night the dog slept at the foot of the old man's bed.

Then one day the dog disappeared. He was playing in the yard one moment, and the next thing the old man knew he was gone. He searched everywhere for him, looked on every street, around every corner, and talked to every neighbor, but the dog was nowhere to be found. The old man searched all over town, calling out the dog's name as he went, listening in vain for his familiar bark. The next day was the same and the one after that...for weeks the old man searched till finally his neighbors and friends convinced him that there was no use looking anymore. Surely the dog is dead, they said. Hit by a car no doubt and crawled off by himself to die.

Still the old man would not give up hope. Every night, before bed, he went out on the porch and called out the dog's name at the top of his voice. This went on for several months. The neighbors were certain that the old man had lost his mind. And then one night, as the old man was calling his name, the little spotted dog came home. The old man never knew where he had been or what caused him to stay away so long, but he was very glad that he had never stopped calling his name.

Last week I stressed the importance of us being ready—of watching and being ready because Jesus is going to return for us. We need to be doing the work that He calls upon us to do: giving to the poor—providing purses that never wear out—gathering together as His church. Jesus says that He came to bring division rather than peace. I can never remember a time in my 65 years of life when I see more division in the world than I do now. Division in our families—our country—our political parties—our world—and yes, even in the church. Maybe He's coming sooner than we think! Is that what our scripture and the signs are telling us? I can't say for sure, but we had better be ready! And how can we be ready? By always, always, always calling on the name of Jesus!

Thanks be to God!