

Daily Discipleship

Luke 12:49-56

Stories of Discipleship: *A Judge's Story*

Focus Question: *How has your choice to follow Jesus caused friction in your life?*

word of life

"You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?" Luke 12:56 (NRSV)

Read Luke 12:49-56

Jesus continues his teachings to the disciples as he prepares them for the end of time. Many times, Jesus is cast as a gentle peacemaker, but in this passage he describes himself as one who brings fire to the earth. He yearns for the fire to be lit and kindled.

1. *What does it mean for Jesus to bring fire to the earth?*
2. *Why would Jesus want that fire to be kindled?*

Some scholars associate the fire with the oncoming of the Holy Spirit, but others see it as a reference to the final judgment. Jesus feels the pressure and stress of the mounting tensions. He is preparing for his own death. His stress or distress is understandable. It is clear his reference to baptism is not of water placed on his head by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, but a deluge of strife. Yet, despite the conflict, Jesus remains on the path towards Jerusalem and completion.

3. *What does it feel like to know Jesus faced stress?*
4. *Since Jesus chose the path to the cross, does it make it easier? Why or why not?*

Jesus knows he is inviting his followers to make some important decisions about their lives and their loyalties. Many of his audience were Jews who like their ancestors anticipated and prepared for the Messiah but may not be able to recognize Jesus as God's anointed.

In the same family unit, others may have open eyes, hearts, and spirits to the good news proclaimed by Jesus Christ. People in the same family may come to different conclusions about Jesus. That is a harsh reality. Instead of peace and goodwill, Jesus brings friction and discord, particularly with those who reject Jesus.

Jesus asks, "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!" (Luke 12:51 NRSV) Anyone who has attended a Christmas Eve worship service might be inclined to believe Jesus came to bring peace. When Jesus was born, the angels proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!" (Luke 2:14 NRSV)

5. *Does this image of Jesus bringing division fit with your image of Jesus?*
6. *Why is this division necessary?*

Jesus is depicted as a judge, ready to cast down fire. He is ready to hold people accountable. Just because a person becomes a disciple of Jesus, this does not mean a life without conflict or friction. Jesus confronts the religious powers of his day and invites them to a new relationship with God. Yet, not all could hear and respond as people individually choose to follow or not.

7. *Does this image of Jesus as a judge fit your image of Jesus? Why or why not?*
8. *Why is there a need for Jesus to judge?*
9. *What about grace?*

word among us

Judith began her freshman year at college with deep curiosity and a thirst to learn. Her parents urged her to stay close to her Jewish roots and attend synagogue regularly. She laughed inside when she heard those words because their family rarely attended services or respected the Sabbath. Their words seemed hollow. Why were her parents pretending to be religious?

Once Judith arrived at college, she chose not to attend Sabbath services at the synagogue, but visited every church and mosque in town. She had no idea what was happening during the worship service, but she became fascinated by the rituals and music. At night, she would search the web for the doctrine and faith practices of religious groups. Exploring faith became a hobby with her. At meals, she would enter religious dialogue with anyone who might be interested in such a conversation. Prayerfully, she discerned her own relationship with God.

On spring break, her parents were dismayed when Judith announced her decision to become a Christian. They took her to the rabbi for counseling. At one family meal, her grandma began to wail and her grandpa stomped out of the room. Her mother stroked Judith's hand and asked again, "Honey, one more time, why do you want to follow Jesus?"

1. *How did you come to believe in Jesus?*
2. *Did you ever go through a "seekers" time period when you questioned your belief in Jesus? Explain.*
3. *Why do you believe some people struggle in their seeking of God?*

Some families still split over religious beliefs while others choose not to discuss religion in their homes. The conflict is too great. Jesus seems to realize he is bringing a crisis into people's lives. Each person makes choices about following Jesus Christ. Faith cannot be passed from one generation to the next generation like an inheritance, but it can certainly be nurtured in the home. But if parents do not believe, a child is not excluded. The Holy Spirit uses people in a variety of settings to share the good news of Jesus.

4. *What situations have you known when a person's decision to follow Jesus meant rejection by others?*
5. *How might you support someone who faces conflict due to following Jesus Christ?*
6. *How do you nurture faith in your home?*

It is tempting to become a Pollyanna and expect all people, especially within the church, to have peace with each other. In this passage, Jesus turns that hope upside down. Some churches have people who are not open to Jesus at work in their lives. They are oblivious to the mission of Jesus Christ and do not want to change from their ways. In those churches, strife can develop as followers of Jesus Christ claim the mission to be the church. In those cases, conflict can be a gift *if* the conflict serves to clarify the issues and help people claim mission.

7. *How can conflict help people to follow Jesus?*
8. *Why must there be a division, rather than harmony?*

Prayer

Jesus, bring your fire and kindle faith. Give me clarity of purpose. Amen

Dig Deeper

Jeremiah 23:23-29

last word

Take a moment and ask someone to share their faith story.



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

Copyright © 2007 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

May be reproduced for local, non-sale use provided the above copyright notice is included.

www.elca.org/evangelism/dailydiscipleship

8/19/07 Page 2 of 2