

**August 17, 2025 - Trinity Episcopal Church - 10th Pentecost**

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***Jesus said, "I came to bring fire to the earth,  
and how I wish it were already kindled!"***

**Luke 12:49**

Although I don't spend a considerable amount of time on social media platforms, one aspect of Facebook that I really enjoy is the "memories" feature, which allows me to look back at photos I posted this time last year or five years ago or whenever. Since late July thru mid-August is when I've usually taken my summer vacation, my Facebook memories of late have been serving up pictures of all the years I've traveled to Michigan with my family.

The place that we rented there for years was typical beach cottage fare: hand-me-down sofas and chairs, furnishings that were all a bit worn and dated, and a large quantity of knick-knacks that I'm guessing the folks who owned the cottage didn't know where else to put. Adorning the walls were plaques and cross-stitched samplers, needlepoint pillows graced the sofas, all with sayings about the beach and being at grandma's house, and inspirational biblical verses meant to encourage and comfort and inspire.

You know what *wasn't* on those cross-stitched samplers and needlepointed pillows? Lines from today's gospel! Like, "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" And, "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided....; they will be

divided: father against son...mother against daughter...daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

If you were looking for a scriptural excuse to pick a fight with or hold a grudge against your children or parents or in-laws, then today’s passage from Luke may be the verses for you! But otherwise....well, the Jesus we encounter today is not our nicey-nice plaque-worthy Hallmark Jesus. But, this is today's gospel – what we call the Good News – and so we're going to have to go on a bit of a hunt to unearth the goodness that may not be quite as evident as it so often is.

To begin, a bit of context might be helpful. A few chapters back, we heard that Jesus had “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51b), meaning that this is the last leg of his ministerial journey before he faces persecution and death, his last chance to preach and teach, his final opportunity to ensure that the points he's been making about the new world order that God envisions and hopes for – what Jesus calls the Kingdom – that those points actually sink in.

His bluntness and directness in this morning's passage in a way come across as a last all-out effort....forget the subtle and enigmatic parables, forget the leading by example; Jesus is just going to lay it out plain. He's been following the model of all good teachers and presenters, to first tell the audience what it is that you're going to tell them. Then you show them and you tell them. And now he's moved on to the last step, to remind them, again, about what he’s already told them.

One commentary I read about this passage drew on the analogy of home renovation.<sup>1</sup> That while people may have been under the impression that Jesus was going to come into their homes to do a little painting and redecorating – maybe move the furniture around a bit – what Jesus had in mind was a total rehab. Gutting the house of our souls right down to the studs; no less than total transformation. Because the world that Jesus inhabited was in crisis. A society of gross inequity, with an occupying power exploiting its people. An empire ruling by means of fear, intimidation, and violence. And Jesus’ mission was to call out the empire, name its atrocities, challenge its violent status quo.

The overall aim of Jesus’ disruptions was to usher in something new, something better—God’s kingdom of love and justice for all—but not everyone saw his disruptions in the same positive light. Because when someone agitates for change—even if that change is for the common good—there are bound to be naysayers and detractors. When Jesus speaks, in Luke’s gospel, about family members turning against one another, he wasn’t being *prescriptive*, but *descriptive*... describing a sometimes inevitable reality when people are presented with challenges to views they hold dear and cling to with ferocity.

For some folks, maybe they were willing to acquiesce to the empire because it benefited them (or seemed to). Or maybe they were afraid to poke the bear, for fear of retaliation from the empire—things might get worse. Or perhaps they saw no alternative to their current condition, and so they gave up; that’s just the way things are. You can imagine all those

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<sup>1</sup> cep.calvinseminary.edu – commentary for Aug. 18, 2013

different reactions happening within the same family, can't you? Everyone united under the spell of oppression, even if they see it slightly differently.

And then imagine what happens when that one family member buys into the gospel message. *"Hey, I heard this guy, Jesus, and he makes a lot of sense to me. He was asking these questions: "Don't you see what's happening all around you?" and "why do you not know how to interpret the present time?" He says that what the empire is doing to all of us is garbage, and we don't have to stand for it, and even though it's going to be hard, there's something better if we work together, and serve one another, and treat everyone justly and with dignity."* And that's when all hell would break loose around the dinner table.

But while some families may have been strained and stretched to breaking when Jesus' challenging message came amongst them, new kinds of families were created. Families formed not around unity of identity, but unity of purpose in pursuing values of love and mercy, inclusion and peace. As Episcopal priest Barbara Brown Taylor described it, "For (Jesus), family was not a matter of whose chromosomes you carry around inside of you but whose image you are created in. It was not a matter of who has the same last name or lives at the same address but who serves the same God, which means that (Jesus') family became huge beyond counting, with lepers and tax collectors and Roman centurions in it, with scruffy looking men who smelled of fish and ladies in robes made of gold brocade and hordes of squealing children."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> BBT, *Gospel Medicine*, pp. 14-18

I think of people who have been separated from their families because they have the audacity to live into who they are. When my daughter, Eli, was in high school, they were part of a group of queer teens and young adults which met each week to talk, in a safe place, about the issues they were facing in their families, their schools, their neighborhoods and churches. One teenager in the group, when they came out to their family as trans, was shunned. Thrown out of their house. And when, some months later, they died by suicide, their family declined to hold a memorial service. But this group—their family by choice—did.

For Jesus, everyone—every last one of us—is a beloved member of the family of God. All of us, no exception. Full stop. And yet, somehow, that simple message makes some people crazy upset. There are those who want to limit God’s family to include only those people who look a certain way, or love a certain way, or hold to a particular set of religious or political beliefs.

Jesus lived to tell us that God’s family doesn’t have an “us” and a “them.” He died—he was killed—because some people found that expansive, inclusive notion so appallingly objectionable. And still today, there are some who claim to be followers of this radically welcoming Christ who are willing to resort to extreme, even violent means, to ensure that absurd distinctions are enforced, to continue to separate those they view as the worthy “us” from the unworthy “them.”

And let me be clear: violence is not just about physical force or harm. Poverty and the ever-widening wealth gap is violence. Hatred is violence. Pillaging the planet is violence. Racism is violence, as is homophobia,

transphobia, misogyny, and silence in the face of injustice. Characterizing all immigrants as criminals, disenfranchising voters, controlling women's bodily autonomy.....all of these are violence. This is the kind of nonsense Jesus railed against, and threatened to burn down with the fire he brought to earth. That work is not yet finished.

If God loving everyone and calling us to do the same is divisive, so be it. If showing welcome and mercy to all who've been tagged as "them" gets some folks agitated, bring it on. If protecting the safety, dignity, and humanity of those most on the margins causes trouble, it's good trouble worth getting into. Belonging to the beloved family of God demands nothing less from us. *Amen.*