



Lectionary 20, Year C

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10th Sunday after Pentecost: Gospel Text – Luke 12:49-56

Gospel: Luke 12:49-56

[Jesus said:] ⁴⁹ "I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already ablaze! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵² From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³ they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

⁵⁴ He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain,' and so it happens. ⁵⁵ And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat,' and it happens. ⁵⁶ 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?"

SERMON TEXT:

I am huge fan of garage sales, auctions, and thrift stores. Especially this year, as I have just recently moved to Indianapolis to begin my role as the Assistant to the Bishop. As I've looked for things to put on the walls, I've noticed lots of signs that say "Amazing Grace" and "Live, Laugh, Love" and "Bless this House" or with Bible verse and the like, but somehow in all my hunts, I have never come across these verses on a sign. I mean, really, where is my sign that reads, "Jesus said, 'Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No.'" I've never sent a card to my in-laws that said, "Hey, Jesus said we should be divided, so no Christmas this year!" Everything about this passage in its little context seems very unlike Jesus and, frankly, quite scary.

Yet, what did John the Baptist tell us about Jesus-that he came to baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. And guess what, when his fire comes, Peter sits with him next to it and proclaims his love, the hearts of the Emmaus disciples burn within them, and the tongues of flame land on the disciples at Pentecost. And his baptism at the Jordan has already taken place, so this must be the baptism that leads to death and resurrection for us all. And we heard earlier this summer, way back in May, about his peace, and that it is not what the world would give, not a false promise of ease with no conflict or worry, but a deeper knowledge that no matter what rages around us, we are safe and protected by the God who loves us. And not just that, but that we are asked to follow God to the extent that it can be uncomfortable for our family relationships. It's not so much that Jesus divides us, but that to follow him causes divisions within our families.

We probably all have stories of family members or friends whose families stopped talking to them because they married someone of a different denomination, belief, political bent, etc. When we stand firm in what our faith tells us, it can divide us from those closest to us. And finally, as far as “interpreting” signs, the more accurate Greek translation is “paying attention to the earth and the sky”. It’s like going outside with a picnic basket packed and refusing to look at the weather app or the sky to check for rain. Of course we do those things, so why wouldn’t we look to what is happening around us and try to respond to it now!

In fact, if you wanted to put this text to a hymn, one of the best ones would be one that would probably cheer our hearts, which these verses certainly initially don’t. If I had the chance to choose a hymn of the day, it would be Shine, Jesus, Shine. Think about it—set our hearts on fire, flood the nations, a reflection of Jesus to world and a chance to tell the world the story it needs to hear.

So why do these verses frighten us so? Why, when I was asked to cover this Sunday for the Region 6 sermons, did I initially pray that I accidentally read the wrong verses for this Sunday? Well, I can think of two very good reasons. The first is context, the rest of chapter 11 is a lot of anger on Jesus’ part. It literally starts out with the words that the people were trampling each other because of their greed to get to Jesus, and from there, Jesus does explain that people are selfish, insecure, violent, untrustworthy, and judgmental, instead of trusting in God and relying in him. So, among all that harshness, these verses seem very much like a continued rant, but I also think it’s because we are not used to hearing Jesus use words like “No” and “Division” and “Constraint”. He is supposed to be the Savior who comes to

bring peace and love and welcome, not as the hymn writer John Ylvisaker once put it, "to upset and annoy". But where does our passion come from if we are not set on fire? Where do our new starts and forgiveness come from if not from the baptism that Jesus chose to share with us? How would we know who we are called to be as children of God if we never stood independent of those who raised us? How often would we be caught even more in the storms of life if we didn't pay attention to the signs of trouble coming? These are words of a Savior getting our attention to care for us in new and perhaps unexpected ways, which is admittedly also upsetting and annoying.

But do you know what else Luke, chapter 11 tells us? Not to worry, five times Jesus breaks out these words, and not to be afraid, that gets three repetitions (and we all know how important three is), and then there are the staying awakes, the being alerts, and most important, the realization of your value to God and to place your heart there. But those too are said with a fierceness that we sometimes forget belongs to Jesus. He wasn't afraid to get our attention when he could see us straying and straining to be the people of God. Sometimes a giant clap is more effective than a light tap, especially in a confused mob, and let's face it, when isn't the world a confused mob.

Yet, in everything Jesus' words remain that of Savior of God's peace (not the world's), God's love, God's welcome, just because it may not always be as easy or the same as we envisioned doesn't mean it isn't there. The fire cleanses, the water renews, the division focuses, and creation tells us which way the Spirit might move us, and through it all, God is there. God is always there. Amen.

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