

Luke 12:49-56

⁴⁹I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵²From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³they 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."

⁵⁴He 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. ⁵⁵And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. ⁵⁶You 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 12:49-56, 2016

“By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”
Luke 1:78-79

These verses are from Zachariah’s prophecy of the coming of a mighty savior upon the preparations made by his son who would later be known as John the Baptist.

“Peace be with you.” Luke 24:36

This greeting from Jesus is found in the closing verses of the gospel of Luke as the resurrected Jesus meets with His disciples one last time before his ascension.

This gospel opens and closes with a message of the coming and ongoing peace brought by the savior, Jesus.

This savior will guide our feet into the way of peace.

He will?

“Peace be with you? Really?”

That isn’t what our gospel lesson seems to say. In fact it says that this savior, Jesus, will bring fire and division to the earth! Even families will be turned against one another.

How can Jesus be a Lord of peace and at the same time a division creating arsonist?

You have heard the stories of Jesus forgiving the sinful woman and then telling her “your faith has saved you, go in peace.”

and healing the woman with the hemorrhage and then saying to her, “your faith has made you well; go in peace.”

When Jesus sent out the 70 he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few...Go on your way...Whatever house you enter, first say, “Peace to this house!”

Peace is an important thread through the gospel message and the gift that Jesus brings into the world.

So what is up with this passage?

When we read or hear this passage we need to hear it in a particular way and that is as being descriptive rather than prescriptive.

If we hear it as being prescriptive then we hear that Jesus purpose in coming is to bring division and conflict, but we know that is not the case.

If we hear this as being descriptive then what we discover is that the changes brought to the world in Jesus’ time and into our lives today by His presence, his message will bring division, conflict and unrest,

and most of that will be within ourselves.

If we take a look back through the gospel of Luke we discover that each time Jesus comes on the scene and does something new conflict erupts.

After Jesus healed the leper, more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad;

Then the forgiven and healed paralytic stands up and goes home glorifying God, while others argued that Jesus shouldn't forgive at all or heal on the Sabbath.

While some were overcome with fear in Nain when Jesus raised the widow's son, others proclaimed, "A great prophet has risen among us!"

A woman came to the Pharisee's house and bathed Jesus feet, kissed and anointed them out of great love

and others ridiculed her and questioned Jesus' allowing this.

- Jesus returns to his home town and preaches a new understanding of a reading from Isaiah and conflict erupts in the synagogue.
- And upon the arrival of his mother and brothers who couldn't get through the crowd to him He asks, "Who is my mother and brother? They are those who hear the word of God and do it."
- Jesus always seemed to be in conflict with the Pharisees about fasting, praying, keeping the Sabbath, justice, humility, hospitality, love and any number of other things.

- As we continue through the rest of the gospel Jesus preaches, “repent or perish,” he drives the sellers out of the market place to restore his house to a house of prayer.
- Community leaders plot to kill Jesus because of the word He brings, the message He preaches, and the powers He claims for himself.

What you can see here is that while Jesus does bring these divisions and conflicts, much of it is directed at him,

But the division grew in the community and some people separate themselves, distanced themselves from Him.

And yet we know that not everyone retreated or turned from Jesus.

We know there were many who followed him, learned from him, were transformed by him,

took up his work along with him,

who loved, served, and worshiped him.

Jesus comes calling the people to a new reality that the Messiah has come and the world is now a different place

and calls for a different way of life and believing.

Jesus set their hearts on fire and they burn with passion either for or against Him and that was enough to set up division in community.

You see, in Jesus’ day the family was the microcosm of the social structure and reality,

and in this passage Jesus uses the family structure to make his point about the community.

“From now on 5 in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three;”

It seems to me, however, that the outward division is only symptomatic of the inward division and conflict that is set up by the presence and words of Jesus.

It is in your heart that Jesus touches you, convicts you and brings about repentance, change, transformation
to a new way of believing, thinking, living.

Judging by what we hear in this passage it seems that it could be dangerous to draw too close to Jesus, to hear too much of what He has to say,

to dig too deeply into what his message means for your life, relationships and faith,

because it could divide your own heart,
create conflict between what you believe and what Jesus calls you to believe,
between how you live and how Jesus calls you to live,
between you and your family, your friends and others you share your life with.

If you study Jesus' teachings you know it is so.

This passage is not a justification or rationalization for conflict or division among family members, congregation members, or in the community for the sake of each persons desires.

The only point of division is the cross of Jesus Christ and it really begins where the cross of Christ resides in you; in your heart.

The struggle with anything always begins within you, especially struggles of faith.

When Jesus comes into your presence, when he speaks to you, you are never the same afterwards, whether he comes to you while you are standing outside looking up at the heavens, or praying, or studying the scriptures.

He will divide what is in your heart from what He wants in your heart and call you to the impossible.

Jesus is saying for one of the last times to the crowds who follow him,

it is time to make up your mind.

are you going to believe in me or not?

are you going to follow me or not.

The time has come. I am on the way to my baptism of pain and suffering and death and it is time for you to believe or not.

Jesus says to you now, "I have died for you so decide how you are going to live your life, cost what it may.

Will you repent?

Will you follow?

The time has come.

You can forecast the weather. How do you interpret the times of your life?

Jesus died for the forgiveness of your sin.

Where in your life does Jesus separate you from wrong for the sake of what is right?

Where does the recognition of your sin divide you, tear you in half, call you to repentance cost what it may, and it does cost?

But it cost him first.

Jesus cuts you in half with his law, his call to repentance, his love.

Then He comes here among you to put you back together again with his gospel, his message, his love, grace and death;

with his body and blood, broken and shed for you.

He invites you to gather around His table to be made whole again.

Here the dawn from on high breaks upon your darkness and gives you light and peace.

Amen

