

Luke 12:49-56

⁴⁹"I 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?"

"Expectations"

Today's Gospel teaching follows the same pattern of hard lessons that Jesus has taught as he continues his ministry, moves closer to Jerusalem and has his passion. Jesus asks, "Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth?" One should stop and contemplate this question. Doesn't it seem like this is counterintuitive to what mainstream Christianity says all the time? Just during Christmas alone, we must hear "**peace on earth, goodwill toward men**" a thousand times a day. We see it on Christmas cards, in songs, and in TV ads for the season. [Radio the rest of the year, Elect from the pulpit]

This is the KJV of Luke 2:14. But listen to the actual verse translated from the original Greek, [I worked in this passage for a minute and translated it as literally as I could, emphasizing the intent of the writer] "**Highest praise to God in the highest position in heaven** (with emphasis that God is a being above creation), **and on earth** (earth as in soil, meaning creation) **peace among humankind** [here is the modifier that the KJV does not have] **who has God's satisfaction.**" (Luke 2:14, My translation for intention) the NIV translates it as "on whom his favor rests." Popular Christianity and even popular theology sweep this modifier under the rug.

We see in this translation division even in the peace that Jesus brings. Because it plainly states that peace is for those God is satisfied with. Those who are in the family of God. Presbyterians like to refer to these as the elect. [that's a different theological debate]

Luke is not the only Gospel to use divisive language. Matthew 25 uses it too. Jesus tells us that he will come and separate humankind as a Sheppard separated the sheep from the goats. Does that sound like division? [yeah] pay attention to that; we will see more this morning.

Jesus says, “I 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!” This is some revelation-level stuff right here. [Oh man, I get excited.] Jesus is speaking of his return. To bring fire, which is judgment, to the earth. Because at this point, he knows that when he comes and brings judgment, there will be a new earth and new Jerusalem. [listen] ¹ *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth, had passed away, and the sea was no more.* ² *And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.* ³ *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and be their God; ⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”* (Rev. 21:1-4) [easy to understand if you read the 1st 65 books]

Luke also tells us the crowd just doesn’t get it. He says, “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?”

Rest assured; Jesus is the dividing factor in this world. Jesus has always been the dividing factor. It has nothing to do with Your Religion, Race, Class, Economics, Country of origin, or anything else humanity arbitrarily assigns to people to divide us like cattle. Therefore, Jesus gives the example of “father against son, mother against daughter” because the ***division is in our hearts***. We either accept that we are sinners and cannot reach salvation by an action, saying a specific prayer, or even attending church every Sunday. We must accept that Jesus is the one who, through his actions, interceded for us before the Father and still intercedes today. This is not new radical theology on Jesus’ part. It is very much grounded in the OT scriptures.

Yom Kippur [Day of Atonement / High Priest / Sacrifice / Holy of Holies]

On The Cross [Jesus atones for our sins; he is the High Priest, standing before God, interceding for us, even as we continue to sin]

This is the theological reason why we end our prayers in Jesus' name! because we can't pray our way to heaven. We can't worship our way to heaven. Jesus has already done that. The beauty of Jesus is this very thing. He is in the Holy of Holies right now, interceding on our behalf, and through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is leading us in worship, and by our worship, we acknowledge this. [Hopefully] It is a reciprocal relationship. God toward us and Us toward God. [This is the literal definition of Communion]

God's expectation of humankind is that we come closer. Jesus is the path for believers to do this.

[Elaborate on Book] *"More important than our experience of Christ is the Christ of our experience."*

[*Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*] – James B. Torrance

Without Christ in worship, translating, interceding, and leading us through the Holy Spirit, everything we do here is in vain. *Praise the triune God of grace that sinners like us can be forgiven.*

We can experience Christ in worship through the Holy Spirit, but it is through the sacrifice of Christ, as the atonement for our sins, that we find peace. And that peace is the forgiveness of God and becoming a part of God's family. "See what great love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children—and we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it didn't know him (1 Jn 3:1)." [Again, divisive language.]

Being a part of the family of God is not a status or badge of honor. Because to be a part of the family of God means we are to live the example of Christ. To be the one who serves. To tend to the poor, widowed, and orphaned. To take up the cross and follow Jesus. (Mt 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23) If we use the status of membership in the family of God as a reason to look down our noses at anyone else for any reason, be it Race, Gender, Politics, you name it, we have lost sight of what Jesus has done for us on the cross. This moves to another teaching of Jesus, do not judge. (Mk 4, Mt 7, Lk 6)

Jesus places great expectations on us. But not impossible expectations. Jesus doesn't ask us to save ourselves. He doesn't want us to be perfect Christian robots walking around saying the right things, praying the proper prayers, knowing the secret club handshake. [Pause] Jesus doesn't expect that because

we can't do it. Even if one of us here this morning could claim to know how it wouldn't be necessary because he has already done it. We only need to accept it and give thanks. This continues to be one of the hardest lessons for me to learn because I have been told my entire life to be self-sufficient. However, it wasn't until I accepted that I could do nothing that matters without the grace of God in my life that I felt peace.

So, this morning, I will ask this question of myself, and I hope you too ask yourself. What are Jesus' expectations of me? How have I lived up to those expectations? How have I failed him? Where have I served the poor, orphaned, widowed? If right now judgment came, and the new heaven was unveiled, and the new earth dropped down from heaven, would I be like those in the crowd? Would I be a hypocrite, a goat, left out of the family of God? Or can I say I accept that in Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, I live in expectation of the coming Christ? I accept the grace that God freely gives because of what Christ did by taking up my cross for me. I expect that only Jesus can be the judge of that. Let us pray...