

Sermon Text: Luke 12:49-56

Wow, what a text.

This text is a challenging one. It is challenging not only for the original audience but for us today. Jesus and the disciples, along with the crowd, continue their trek towards Jerusalem. In this passage, Jesus teaches his disciples and then he turns to the crowd and teaches them. If you want to re-examine the text, Jesus is teaching the disciples in verses 49-53 and then the crowds in verses 54-56.

Now, if you heard the Gospel text today and it was a head-scratcher; you are not alone. Many listeners of the time and church members today are more use to hearing the words of peace instead of division. Yet, Jesus clearly states that he has come to bring division. This statement seems to contradict much of his preaching.

Thus, this passage is not only challenging, it can test our theology. It has the potential for us to question everything that we ever believed about his teachings, mission and purpose. We will not be able to cover all the details. Unfortunately, we will not be able to answer all the questions, either. But, it can be a springboard for us to wrestle with some of the tough questions that we may now have. Matt Skinner gives us just a few to brainstorm on and they include:

- 1) Who exactly was Jesus?
- 2) What was his message?
- 3) How worried should we be?

Our Tuesday morning bible study at a lower than normal turnout, yet it brought about some great discussion. One area that we discussed at length and shared multiple view points from was “fire”. With the conversation that we had, it pushed me to study the word and thought more. In our reading from the NRSV, it is the 5<sup>th</sup> word in our reading. So, we jump right into a challenging aspect of the text. Allow me, once again, to turn to “The Message” and let you hear it a-fresh:

*“I’ve come to start a fire on this earth—how I wish it were blazing right now! I’ve come to change everything, turn everything right side up—how I long for it to be finished!”*

When I hear the word of fire, I like to think of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost or God’s presence. Maybe you can remember the story in Nehemiah when he stated:

*You led our ancestors by a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night so that they could find their way.*

If we lean really hard into the concept that “fire” connotes God’s presence and I want you to do that then we can see why Jesus wants to kindle this fire and do it **immediately**. He wants to strike that match.

A side note, this past week, the ELCA had their church-wide-assembly and their were individuals and committees that took their matches out and began the process of igniting a match and remove the barriers that may be allowing the Holy Spirit to move freely. More on that in the up-coming weeks and in the weekly updates and newsletter where we will share what happened. But, for now, let us jump back to Jesus and this text.

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Jesus is yearning for the Kingdom of God to break forth into the world in all of its fullness. So, what are some of the things that “must go” if the Kingdom of God would truly come into our world.

Oppression would disappear.

Greed will be tossed out the window.

Idolatry would be taken out with the trash

Those are just three components. There are many things that can be named and I would love for you to take time this week and think of aspects of life that must be put aside. If you are courageous enough, here could be your homework assignment: *“Write down and evil that comes to your mind that prevents the flourishing of all people and all creation.”*

In the past, I have seen this passage in a different light. Maybe, you look at it in the way that I did in the past. Individuals think of the fire and imagine God sending fire down from the heavens and burning them to a crisp. It’s judgment time. God is just waiting to burn up some poor sinners. This theology, in my opinion, comes from some bad popular theology and some terrible bumper-sticker theology that can be seen in the U.S. As mentioned, I was there. Instead of avoiding Jesus in this passage and skipping ahead where he shares a nicer story; we run away.

My view has changed and I will share that view with you and I will invite you to join me in at least part of this new view that I am resting into. I believe that it is obvious that Jesus is revealing some intense desires in this passage. However, I don’t think his desire is to rain down fire. Remember, not too long ago, we read about Jesus stopping his disciples from raining down fire when individuals were not welcoming them and accepting their message. In case, you want a brief reminder, here are the words of Luke 9:

*But when the Samaritans learned that his destination was Jerusalem, they refused hospitality. When the disciples James and John learned of it, they said, “Master, do you want us to call a bolt of lightning down out of the sky and incinerate them?” Jesus turned on them: “Of course not!” And they traveled on to another village.*

If the intense desire of Jesus was not about bringing down the fire; what was it about? Jesus wants the world to have well-being. Many individuals may struggle to believe that is a troubling statement but even today, there are many individuals who do not want God’s love and grace to be extended to “those people”. The message that Jesus brought was this message and it was this message that caused divisions; even among family members.

As I was studying and preparing for the message, I was reminded of a hard truth that I heard a few years ago. Matt Skinner said that this well-being doesn’t just spring into action because you or me want it to happen. The first step into making it happen is that the truth must be told. Truth-Telling is definitely a hard first step. In truth-telling, sometimes it means that we must speak out publicly to the injustices that we see in our world.

When it comes to truth telling, Jesus spoke many hard truths. There were many times that individuals closed their ears to the truth or even denied that it was taking place. When they did not accept his message, there was great division and that division led to him being rejected and then suffering immensely and then his death.

Well, here I am needing to try to wrap up the sermon and I have remained with Jesus and his disciples the whole time and I have not stepped into the last three verses where Jesus addressed

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the crowd. So, let me step into those verses and try to show the importance that they may have for us today.

Jesus is fairly blunt with the crowd. He is shocked that they know how to interpret the weather yet they struggle with their interpretation of the present time and what Jesus was trying to accomplish. He came with the words of repentance and lived it out in his daily life.

I am not sure if we fully grasp forgiveness and what it means for us and the society that we live in. As Christians, we really need to look at ourselves and the world from God's perspective. God's perspective, my friends is about justice and bringing peace. When we engage in those actions, God promises us to meet in this love and solidarity as we walk with our neighbors.

It is my hope and prayer that we as an individual and as a church will take this journey. Can we align ourselves with the priorities of God and pursue the components that will lead to us to strike the match that Jesus is speaking of?

To bring this fire into the world, we need to live into a new way of life. We need to relate to one another with forgiveness, courage and humility.

David Lose when examining this text asks the following question: How do we hear Jesus pronouncement that he brings fire and division rather than peace?

It is a question that I think that we all need to wrestle with. For me, one of the areas that I want to invest my time in is trying to help the lowly and the powerless. One small way that I am attempting to do that is to connect with the Door County's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion movement that is occurring in our community.

Each and everyone of us must take a look at our baptismal promises and find ways that we are going to strive for justice and peace in all the earth. When you truly do this, be prepared; division will occur. AMEN.