

Why are we not Friends Anymore?

Luke 12: 49-56

Today I have to admit our gospel lesson for today is not the Jesus I'm comfortable with. All this talk about bringing fire to the earth and that he can't wait until it's set ablaze. What kind of talk is that? Then there is the part about how households will become divided because of him. That means we might not be friends anymore because we don't agree with each other. For goodness' sake, that's exactly opposite from the kind of community we're trying to build here. The Jesus we grew to love came down at Christmas. Soon Christmas will be here and I we will be singing Christmas carols: songs like "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly" and with the phrase, "Peace on the earth, good will to all, from heaven's all gracious King!" On Christmas Eve, churches around the world will sing, "Silent night, holy night." We'll be reminded of the birth of the Savior, and we'll hear again the song of the angels to the shepherds: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" Is it fair to say or ask in today scripture, "Are we talking about the same Jesus here?" In today's passage in Luke, Jesus says, "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?" And the answer we have to ourselves, "Yes, Jesus! Isn't that what the angels said?" We want Jesus to say that he has come to bring peace and harmony to us, to our families, to our communities and to our world.

Jesus said, "No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three..." We're looking for love, peace, grace and mercy. And Jesus brings all of those things in the midst of our lives that are often torn apart. He heals relationships and offers help in times of loss and grief. But in this passage Jesus is talking about something very different. Jesus is addressing the life-changing decision and the consequences of whether to follow Jesus or not. Is he Lord of your life or is he not Lord of your life? Jesus begins this section talking about his own mission: "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" There is a lot of discussion among commentators and preachers about what the "fire" refers to. One commentary says, "The fire stands for the spread of the message or the power of God ..." while another says, "The fire probably refers to the impending end-time judgment."

It could also be a reference to John the Baptist's words in Luke 3:16: "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; ... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." What we can say is that Jesus knew he was quickly approaching the time when he would fulfill his mission on earth. He was going to meet sin and death head on, and nothing would ever be the same again — for him or for the world. "How I wish it were already burned!" "I have a baptism, I must experience and what stress I am under until it is completed," Jesus said. He knew the things that were going to happen to him. Certainly the "baptism" Jesus referred to here was the Cross and all things leading up to it. Jesus did not go blindly into Jerusalem unaware of what awaited him. No, he went there with knowledge and stress, but fully committed to seeing his mission on earth to its completion. Jesus demonstrated his mission through his words and action. In John 15:13: Jesus' mission was demonstrated and completed, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

A good question for us all. Do families and friends agreed on everything? Are we friends anymore? What topics in a household is safe to talk about? For instance, who is the best baseball team? (pause) Red Sox or Yankee! Then ask anyone about their family and then sit back and listen and you will most likely hear stories. From sibling rivalries to siblings who would protect each other against all things; from parents who sacrifice everything to see their kids get ahead in life to parents who beat and abuse their children; from "crazy Aunt Betty" to "Uncle Fred" who was a better dad to you than your own father. Families are a building block of life, and families are a gift from God. Except when they aren't. Jesus says, "From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; 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." Families are where we are nurtured and taught, where we find protection and love, where we always have a place. So it was especially shocking to hear Jesus talk about division within the family — not just as a possibility but as something that will happen. We need to see why Jesus makes this statement about division. It is not because of poor parenting; it is not about differences in politics; it is not about career choices. It is about division that occurs because of following or not following Jesus. Following Jesus requires difficult choices that can result in division within the family.

It's still true today. A Hindu, Muslim or Jew converts to Christianity — and the family wants nothing to do with her or him. An addict is able, with the help of God, to turn his or her life around and is on fire for Jesus — and the family wants nothing to do with him or her. Jesus was right when he said, “This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.” When one person is following Jesus and the light, other members of the family, friends or co-workers or neighbors or classmates, may shun or reject that person because their own sin is exposed. Why now is a question for us to ponder with? Another question that comes up from this passage is “Why did Jesus tell his disciples about this now?” Two obvious answers come to mind. First, as Jesus was preparing for his “stressful baptism” (arrest, crucifixion, death and resurrection), he wanted his disciples to remain faithful regardless of what the future held for him and for them. Equally important is that Jesus wanted his disciples (and us) to have a realistic picture of what a decision to follow him entails.

Jesus wanted them to enter into a relationship with him knowing the reality that this decision might alienate the very people they valued most. Jesus wanted all believers to realize that this is a broken world with deep problems and scarred by sin — problems so deep that Jesus left his home in heaven so that “everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” Jesus had a higher calling than family. How do we focus on Jesus today? Much of the Christian culture of our day puts a great emphasis on the family. Then the ultimate focus must not be on the family, but on God. Our priority must not be family first, but God first. God alone has sole claim to our absolute allegiance and utmost loyalty.”¹⁰

I believe many of us in our families we have stories, but sometimes I believe we think we only have the fairy tales stories in our family but really the truth will set us free. In my own family I have a prodigal son who has disown his family since 2002-- fourteen years ago. To make the story short Dan's sister Jenn were so close that if one of them said the sky was purple the other would believe it. Dan's chose to live with my ex. Another words Dan's has made a choice in his own life to disown all the family who really care about him as a person of value--- there was so much love. And he had care about them too. From his sisters, --Jenn, Sarah, and Hannah who

really don't know him, his niece, Haley, his parents me and Martha, grandparents especially my Mom he had spent a lot time with growing up. Church and Church Camp—Camp Mechuwana, Rallyings was big part of his life. Many friends he had connected to by Camp Mechuwana, Rallyings and youth Group that he also disconnected with too. Dan's relationship with God was important to him at one time. It really doesn't matter what his reason is because he made the choice and let the influence of hate and revenge from his biological Mom rule his true heart. For I was angry with God for many years of not making a resolution happen. We sure tried. The question for me was: I wanted him in my life like we always had it before. What I realize and I remind myself that I need to pray first that he finds God again first. Then I believe all the pieces will fall into place. There is a lesson for us all about how we are influence by our own agenda and choices we make. Sometimes our priorities are wrong. God needs to be first and then we can begin experiencing God to the fullest..

"Do you think that I have come to give peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." Jesus lived in the real world. He saw, with sorrow and compassion, the sunlight and the shadows of human nature. He did not delude himself that he would be universally accepted. Our world, from ancient Palestine to modern America, is evidence of the clarity of his vision. What are the divisions regarding Jesus? There are, of course, those who love him, follow him and serve him: Peter, Paul, John Wesley, Mother Teresa and a host of others - some of whom are here today. Then there are those who try to be neutral toward him; like Pilate, who said, "I find no fault in this just person - but see you to it" (Matthew 27:24); like Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night and called him "a teacher come from God" and got a sermon on commitment for his trouble (John 3:2); like some moderns who try to say that Jesus is a good man - but only that and nothing more. Pilate found out he could not be neutral as he discovered.

Every person must come down on one side or the other. Jesus said, "He who is not with me is against me." (Matthew 12:30) He cannot be "just a good man." Either he is God as he claimed to be - "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) and "He that has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9) - or else he is not even a good man, but one of the most audacious liars and first-class frauds that history has produced. If we think like Jesus did then there no way we could ever be neutral. Every person must come down on one side or the other. Then there are those who

despise and reject him. Today Christians and churches are reminded to understand what Jesus meant when he said, Jesus said, "I came to bring division." The important question for us is this: Where are we in this division? How does this Gospel apply to us? At least three things apply.

1. Since we are here at worship, of course we assume that we are those who love and serve him. This is devoutly to be hoped, but we need to examine our attitudes to see how true it is. Are we being faithful in our witness for him? Or are going with the crowd or don't want be involve in conflict issue. Is our occasional church attendance only a sop to social conformity? Does our stewardship reflect our uncommitted life?

There a story that told of woman and her small son visited a church, and the pastor visit the woman's home. Only the husband was at home. They talked about church, and husband said he guessed he was a member somewhere "back home" but he wasn't sure. Then he added "My wife is the churchgoer in our family." The pastor asked him as kindly as he could, "As far as Christianity is concerned, whose side are you on?" the husband e laughed and said, "I guess I'm not on anybody's side, as you put it." But he was! Not to decide is to decide. Can there be any doubt as to which side you are on?

2. We cannot force the Christian life on others, but if we are true to our witness for Jesus we can do our best to exhibit it and make it attractive to others. Our witness is not to condemn, but to invite - to tell in words and show in deeds what Jesus means to us; to tell and show with kindly conviction the strengthening power of our prayer and Bible study, and let the Holy Spirit use it as he will.

3. If we are true to our witness for Jesus, there will be opposition, just as there was to our Lord himself. We can expect it. No one is asking for our crucifixion, but there are those who will call us "goody-two-shoes" and ridicule our Christian faith as "pie-in-the-sky-bye-and-bye." Our daily life should show that it is not "pie-in-the-sky-bye-and-bye" but that we dance to the tune of Jesus. That is so different. So it comes right down to the personal question: in the division over Jesus, which side are you on? How does your witness, your way of life, your stewardship of time and talent answer that question?