

Sermon ✝ August 14, 2022

Luke 12:49-56

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I grew up in the fifties. It was a seemingly simpler kind of time. Everything in the fifties was so well defined. Right was right and wrong was wrong. There were no gray areas. Everything had its proper place and the world in which I lived seemed so orderly.

The television shows we watched in those early days of T.V. were indicative of fifties kind of thinking. The classic, Ozzie and Harriet Show, kind of epitomized that era. The Nelsons were such nice people. David and Ricky were such nice kids and they never really got into any serious trouble. Ozzie and Harriet were so understanding, a bit confused . . . but so understanding. They lived in a nice comfortable home and had a lot of the modern-day conveniences. And we always wondered how they managed to live so well because Ozzie never went to work. Strangest of all was the fact that they never really yelled or argued with one another. There was never any major strife. It was truly an antiseptic look at the American family.

Now the church of the fifties sort of took its cues from the attitudes of the day. Everyone went to church in the fifties. It was nice to go to church. Everything was so well defined. Right was right and wrong was wrong. We were all on the same side.

The Jesus of the fifties was a sweet and gentle Jesus. We encountered him in church on Sunday mornings and often left him there. The Jesus of the fifties was not overly concerned with world hunger or racial justice or global warming. It was all so simple and uncomplicated . . . life in the fifties.

I begin, this morning, by telling you all of this because like it or not, much of the way I think today was shaped by what I learned as a young boy growing up in the 1950's. All that we learn as children tends to become imbedded far within the cracks and crevices of our memories. We carry it with us forever . . . like extra baggage.

And that baggage from my childhood still allows me to be shocked whenever I am confronted with a lesson like the one we just read from Luke's Gospel. The Jesus pictured in this passage seems to crash head-on with the Jesus of my childhood memory. I love lessons like this one from Luke for I grow up a little bit more every time I read one.

Maybe you are like me. Maybe you're carrying some of that extra baggage around with you. Let us grow up together as we consider this lesson from Luke . . . a lesson that deals with a fiery baptism and division amongst God's children.

Jesus is in the process of teaching his disciples while they are in the midst of a great multitude. He is telling them what he expects of people who wish to follow him. He wants the people to understand, right from the start, that it's not going to be any picnic.

And he uses some pretty strong language to make his point . . . he uses words that evoke vivid images for his listeners . . . *baptism . . . fire . . . peace . . . division.*

Jesus own baptism was actually a baptism by fire. It was a turning point in his life. When Jesus was baptized, it meant death for him. It meant that he was committed to God's plan.

He chose, in obedience to the Father's will, a course which led to death. It was a difficult decision. Death was not Jesus' first choice . . . "*If possible, let this cup of suffering pass from me.*"

Jesus was full of life and emotion . . . he truly loved all of humanity. For Jesus to suffer death through the hatred of others was for him to drink a bitter cup. Jesus was telling his disciples and the multitude about his baptism by fire that they might begin to understand and appreciate his commitment.

And then he dropped this bomb: "*I have come for division!*"

Just when you thought it was safe to follow this Jesus . . . this new Messiah . . . he dumps this business of division right in your laps.

Just when you thought it might be a good for your entire family to go to church together, you discover you might experience a split.

Once again, Jesus was just being open and straightforward with his friends. He was simply saying, "*There will be division because you are not all going to want to do what I ask . . .*"

"I'm willing to love most people, but my boss is a jerk."

"I can forgive everyone except _____."

One of the main reasons we have so many different denominations is because we all like to read the Bible a different way . . . so that it suits our own interpretations. Diversity is divine but division can become selfish separatism. God says, "*Health and wholeness.*"; we say, "*Separation.*"

And so it was . . . that into the midst of a sinful and troubled world that God did send his Son, Jesus, the *piece-maker* . . . to cut clean so as to heal and make whole again.

The great paradox is that this man who came to bring peace to world has often been the reason for the world's conflicts . . . but he never promised that it would be any different.

Okay . . . what does all of this have to do with us? We have all been called to be piece-makers.

Winston Churchill said at the height of World War II to those who asked, “*What are we fighting for?*” “*Stop fighting and you'll soon find out.*”

Christians should never be at peace with wickedness. Too many of us continue to think of *peace* as meaning *rest* and *quietness* rather than as an ongoing process in which conflicts are faced and resolved in hope and love.

We still regard submissiveness as more Christian than resistance.

The Christian who faithfully bears witness to Christ will be the victim of an inescapable amount of misunderstanding . . . no matter how gentle or tactful he or she is. *And* . . . if you never feel misunderstood as a Christian then perhaps you are merely paying lip-service to your faith and not actually practicing it.

We ask this morning that we be made whole again. We ask for the *piece-* maker to come to us and to put us together again.

We pray that we may be able to understand what Jesus is saying to us.

And, we pray that we will not be afraid to hear Jesus saying it to us.

For we, too, have been baptized with fire.

Come, Lord Jesus, make us whole.