

Jeremiah 23:23-29

Luke 12:49-56

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

“Rescue, O God, the weak and the needy.
Rise up and judge the earth.” AMEN!

Wow, now I see why so many people stay
away from church in the summer! :-)

Texts like these can be hard to swallow!

Have you noticed the way
these past Sundays it has been increasingly
harder to announce

“Praise to you, O Christ” after
the gospel reading?

It’s like, “Praise to you, O Christ? Really?
Thanks, I guess?!”

The difficulties we may have in making
that proclamation will not let up
for the next few Sundays as Jesus brings
us (again) hard truths about our choices,

our behaviors, and about doing things
that make us uncomfortable but help others.

And, many a preacher will take the opportunity
(if one can call it that) to fist pound

the pulpit this Sunday.

Unleash the Word of God like fire and
work to break the hardness of
people's hearts with hammering words.

We'll put on the mantle of prophet and sing
"Do this, Don't do that!
Can't you read the signs?!?!" :-)

These sermons work when preached
to a community that is experiencing
persecution and oppression.

But what kind of tone do we need today?

To begin, it is good for us to know that,
in our pericope today from Luke,
we find this gospel divided into two parts:

Jesus causes division (section 1) and
the second part is his encouragement
"to interpret the signs."

We've already touched on the division part, right?
"Do this! Don't do that!"

And the Lord knows we are more
than aware of the aching division that is present

in church and society.

Division quickly occurs when we hear of
a person's source for news, or
their political party, maybe from
their bumper sticker, or
choice of school, etc...

In a shockingly open way, we have Jesus
honestly saying how
he will cause division.

Jesus admitted how he would
divide households and families.

It is an proclamation that flies in the face of
the gospel's chapter one angelic promise of
"good news" and "peace on earth."

Yet, this division was not his purpose
but division was the result of
his actions and words.

It ought not surprise us.

The shadow of division has been
openly present in Luke.

There's Mary's Magnificat song where

she notes God's separation/division
because of what people were doing.

There is favor on the servant and
there is mercy upon those who
respect God.

The favor and mercy given because of what was
happening to people.

When on the other hand, God removes
powerful kings from thrones, lays them low
and scatters the arrogant and the egotistical.

God sorts, separates, and divides
according to what people are doing.

Today, your pastor will not fist pound the pulpit,
instead we will interpret what Jesus did and
what it would have meant for his followers

to hear him say the result of His being on earth
and teaching God's vision will cause division.

From these interpretations, we too
may be able to interpret what is happening in
our day and in our world and what it
means for us as a church. (Pause)

Jesus' speech of creating division should
not be a surprise to us.

That doesn't mean it is easy to hear
but it shouldn't be a surprise. (Pause)

When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to
the temple as a boy in chapter 2,
we have the words from Simeon
speaking directly to Mary.

“This child is destined for the falling and
the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign
that will be opposed so that the inner
thoughts of many will be revealed -

and a sword will pierce your own soul too,”

Jesus is the sign from God that will be opposed
and a sign that will be soul piercing.

Mary, Jesus' own mother, and receiver of
an angelic announcement will also
undergo her own struggling judgement and
encounter her own opposing inner
thoughts in her response to
God's Word. (Repeat)

Jesus redefined family and you can grasp perhaps
how that felt for Mary... it pierced her soul.

Family is no longer defined by genetics
and blood relations...

according to Jesus, family now belongs to and
includes those who hear
the Word of God and do it.

Sometimes, I'm a family member of Jesus
and sometimes I encounter opposing
inner thoughts and struggling judgment
and become an estranged family member.

And that is gut wrenching and
soul stirring for the insider.

But, to the outsider and the marginalized,
the one wanting deeply to come into Jesus,
it is the sweetest affirmation of God's
inclusive covenantal priorities. (Pause)

God's peace is not Pax Romana.
God's peace is not Rome's peace.

That "peace" system of empire is the
Lind we are familiar with...

It is startling how Rome and the United States
are so similar.

When systems of power and governments
speak of “keeping of the peace” it is done
to keep the powers that be, in place.

This is the “can’t we just get along,” kind of peace.

While I often hope for the same “getting along,”
Jesus will divide this false “getting along”
peace from his passion and
intense desire to see
the world radically change.

This is why he came, to show us how to overthrow
the evils of power and flip the idea of status
and success upside down. (Pause)

Now, for the interpretations section.

The text concludes with Jesus saying:
You know how to interpret the appearance of
the earth and sky, but why do you
not know how to interpret
the present time?

How does the fire of Jesus’ teaching and
the piercing of his word reveal the

hearts of St. Stephen?

For you and for me?

“Fire is an ambivalent image in scripture.”

There are burning bushes that reveal God,
tongues of fire at Pentecost,
and there are fiery results that come from sin.

“Fire is ambivalent in the present, as well.”

Writes Commentator Jerusha Matsen Neal.

“Catastrophic wildfires exacerbated
by rising temperatures and drought,
bring devastation.

But, wildfires also lead to new life,
creating the conditions for habitat diversity
and helping plants adapt
to novel climates.” (Juli G. Pauses and Jon E.
Kelley, “Wildfires and Ecosystem Service”)

The fire Jesus describes is costly,
but it serves the purpose of life and love.

The purpose of life and love, however does
not serve the purpose of comforting the affluent.

Jesus will always comfort the afflicted and
afflict the comfortable.

Jesus just said, in Luke 12:48,
“From everyone to whom much has been given,
much will be required; and from the one
to whom much has been entrusted,
even more will be demanded.”

Jesus’ fire is not like a comfortable and
safe fire burning in a hearth.

It is a light that leads to action and service;
one that cleanses and refines; hurts and heals.

A fire of love that burns away complacency
and avoidance, melts self-preservation and
our false senses of control.

Today the urgent call comes
to the church,
to all of us...

Do we know how to interpret the present time?

With our hearts tested, God’s Spirit is
revealed.

Beloved, do you know how important you are
to bringing about Christ's vision for the world?

AMEN!