



August 14, 2022

*Pentecost 10*

*Luke 12:49-56*

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Welcome to this summer sermon series that our Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada is providing for congregations. I am Rev. Prema Samuel and I serve as the Assistant to the Bishop for Congregational Life of the Synod of Alberta and the Territories. It is great to be with you this Sunday.

In the spirit of respect, reciprocity and truth, I honour and acknowledge that I live and work and pray on traditional and ancestral territory of the many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit whose footsteps have marked these lands for centuries. I am speaking to you today from Treaty 6 territory and Métis Nation of Alberta, Region IV, in Leduc. Leduc is situated on the traditional territories of the Peoples of Treaty 6, which includes 16 Alberta First Nations, as well as the Peoples of the Métis Nation of Alberta.

I acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit who have lived in and cared for these lands for generations. I am grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us. I make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory I reside on or am visiting. I invite you to take a moment in gratitude to acknowledge the land in which you are joining us from.

**A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke, the 12th chapter:**

“I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already ablaze! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what constraint I am under until it is completed. Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! 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.”

He 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. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

The Gospel of our Lord - Praise to You, O Christ.

Gee, somebody got up on the wrong side of the bed! Somebody give this Jesus some coffee. Who is this guy?

Jesus has been teaching as he goes. A parable here, an exhortation there. In fact, earlier in chapter 12 of Luke, Jesus’ teachings feel rather reassuring and cozy...he tells his followers not to worry, to consider the birds of the air and lilies of the field, reminding them that they are precious in God’s sight. And hear these words of comfort, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) This is my kind of Jesus.

Our text for today gives us real pause. Here is the Prince of Peace, the one the angels sang their praises about at his birth, the love of God incarnate, Jesus, The Christ, telling his listeners that he has come to bring division. By following him, families will sunder. Communities will sunder. This isn’t peace. This isn’t comforting. This is chaos. And we don’t know what to do with this passage.

It feels like Jesus has had a terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad day. “I have come to bring fire to the earth, and oh how I wish it were blazing already! Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No! I’ve come for division!” Jesus is confronting and disrupting and turning things upside down. Well then. What happened to considering the lilies? And our preciousness in God’s sight? I mean,

Jesus! Where did this angry guy come from? One commentator that I read as I prepped for this verse even called this passage embarrassing. It wasn't Jesus as we understood him. This was an angry, demanding Jesus who made us uncomfortable and uneasy.

In the children's novel *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, four British siblings enter a coat closet and discover a whole other world called Narnia. This magical world is filled with talking animals and the original Lion King, a lion named Aslan, who rules over all of Narnia. The youngest child Lucy strikes up a conversation with Mr. Beaver, asking about Aslan, "is he quite safe?" to which Mr. Beaver replies, "'Safe?' Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. 'Of course, God isn't safe, but God is good.

Perhaps this text is so uncomfortable for us because it doesn't match our experience. That isn't what being part of a church is all about. But what we don't understand in this part of the world is something that my relatives in India understood all too well.

My maternal Grandmother, who I call as Ammamma was known as a prominent evangelist and faith healer. Her Ashram stands to this day outside of Bangalore, India. I spent much of my time there as a child and when my Ammamma died, her children by blood and in ministry continue to run the Ashram to honor the life of her mother and the ministries that had been established there over the years. Education for rural children, a church, an orphanage among many. I saw many things there that I can only call a miracle in the most real sense of the word. Yet it wasn't always that way.

My Ammamma was in fact a convert from Hinduism. While she was a Hindu, her family comes from the Brahmin caste and were temple builders, deeply honoring the faith they had been born into. A family that was deeply respected and was wealthy. She was loved, adored, and spurned.

But when my Ammamma encountered the Gospel and converted, everything changed. Her husband, my grandfather, my Thatha initially was not in favor of her decision. He knew what the repercussions were likely to be. Eventually, her faith and her passion won him over, and he joined her in her new faith.

That brought the change. Their families tried to convince them, threaten them. But when it didn't work, they shunned them... ostracized them. But many of her

family members never reconciled themselves to the fact that she was now a Christian. Her family shunned her for the rest of their days. Her brother who adored her didn't want anything to do with her or anyone associated with her. She was dead to him, as long as she remained a follower of Christ.

Despite everything that she had to endure, her faith continued. She never wavered in following the one whom she had encountered, the Risen Christ and her devotion to him was absolute, even when it cost her family. She was a Christian. It was who she was.

Just as my Ammamma performed great acts of love and compassion, her daughter, influenced deeply by her mother, went on to a life of service. Her ministry was quite different than my Ammamma's. She was the consummate church diplomat, but her life had an incredible impact on so many others as she strove for justice for women, the Dalits and all those who were vulnerable to the whims of those with power. And it all started when my Ammamma chose to follow Jesus.

Things are so different in this part of the world. Many of us were born into our church and have known nothing else. The Canadian society is one where various religious practices have a place and most people are open to that wonderful tapestry of faith traditions. Any persecution that does arise is decried by most people. I wonder, how would we react if we were put into a position like my Ammamma, when we stand to lose everything just by following Jesus?

We may believe that this is a hypothetical consideration which we will likely never encounter, yet we face an important crux in our history. The role of faith groups is being tested right now in North America. Often, our name as Christians has been attached to a lot of questionable behavior (to put it mildly).

Will we side with justice and stand up against these practices and for the rights of all people? Will we act as stewards and protectors of the created world? Will we follow the example of Jesus, the justice bringer and risk alienating our friends and family or members of our church? Or will we side with the status quo which would have the church stay silent, concentrating on an easy complacent spirituality, a few fun programs and generally staying out from under foot? That is the easier way. But it is not the way Jesus calls us to. Do we have the courage, even though we know that if we follow where Jesus leads, we may find out firsthand what he is talking about in this passage?

The truth is, whether I am telling the story of my Ammamma or asking us to consider the way of mercy, the result, if we are left on our own, is the same. We would fail. If the Holy Spirit had not been with my Ammamma, she would not have lasted. If the Holy Spirit had not been with the many converts throughout history, they would have failed too. And any justice work we try to do would be dead before we even had the chance to start it if the Holy Spirit wasn't with us.

Thus, this passage becomes less about Jesus being angry to Jesus being prophetic. He knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, what would happen if a person was to take his call seriously. It would burn. It would mean sacrifice. It would mean division. It would mean pain. But the world needed those men and women in the world. The world needed the message that they were to carry to all whom they encountered.

The call goes on for all of us and the consequences have not changed. That isn't easy to hear, but it is still the truth, just as it was when Jesus first uttered these words. We will speak truth to power, stand up for the weak and vulnerable, advocate for the created world, and live into the radical love of God. We will have hope when the world falls farther and farther into despair. And it will cost us. But it will also sustain us. It will sustain us with the knowledge of God's spirit with us always, now, and forever. God is breathing God's very life into us so that we can take that next step and the one after and the one after that. And in so doing, we discover a life of purpose, grounded in that same, radical, all-encompassing love.

It was the love that sustained my Ammamma. It is the love that has sustained every Christian throughout the course of time. It is the same love that will sustain us. As the fire burns, the Spirit reminds us that God is with us in the fire. Like the ashes left after the forest fire produce rich soil, the ashes left behind after the strange fire of God's refining are the starting point for new life.

God has used dust and ash to create since the Garden of Eden, kneeling in the soil breathing new life. And God does so with us today. God kneels in the dirt and ash, gently whispering and tending, patiently cherishing, and coaxing new life out of places that appear charred and ruined. Where we see only worthless destruction, God sees promise and hope. Despite everything that may be lost as we follow our Risen Saviour, nothing could be greater than that amazing gift of love.

Amen.