

Sermon Draft

Text: Luke 12:49–53 (54–56)

Sermon: No More Division

The Gospel from Luke shows that the true word of peace still brings division. Jesus' work wasn't easy; likewise, Christians' lives will not be easy. Yet, *“the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us”* (Romans 8:18).

While I was serving at Christ Lutheran, we had number of members who had to endure amputations. Either because of diabetes, poor circulation, or injury, the gangrenous limb had to be cut off. What a dreadful thing! In fact, we had one parishioner who became a double amputee due to diabetes. In order to save his life, two dreadful amputations of his legs were necessary.

In a similar way, in our Gospel Jesus is dreading what lies ahead. He wishes the fire was already kindled. He's distressed until his bloody baptism is completed.

It reminds us of Jesus' words, ***“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour”*** (John 12:27). It reminds us of Gethsemane, when Jesus' soul was overwhelmed with sorrow and he prayed that the cup be taken from him. He was full of dread, and yet determined, ***“your will be done”*** (Matthew 26:42).

In today's text, Jesus dreads the fire and the bloody baptism, his suffering, crucifixion, and death, not only because of the physical torments, and not only because he would endure the wrath of God, but also because of one of the side effects of the Gospel: division.

It's not the fault of the Gospel, for the Gospel is peace, but it's the fault of sin that Jesus' death causes painful divisions. Ironic, but true: The Gospel of peace brings division.

It's true what Isaiah says—Jesus is the Prince of Peace. On the night of his birth, the angels said, ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace”*** (Luke 2:14).

The night when he was betrayed, he said to his disciples, ***“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you”*** (John 14:27). On Easter eve, Jesus really meant it when he said to his disciples, ***“Peace be with you”*** (John 20:19, 21). Jesus gives us a peace that the world cannot give, a peace that passes all understanding. Isaiah talks about that peace in poetic ways: ***“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb” (Isaiah 11:6), and “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks”*** (2:4).

This is the peace between God and man. It’s a peace in believers’ hearts. It’s the peace of knowing that our sins are forgiven. Some would like the Gospel to give world peace, a utopia on earth. Some expect a millennial kingdom on earth. But that will never happen.

Because of sin, Jesus divides like nothing else—even more than politics! Some will believe, and some will refuse.

Ever since the fall into sin, there has been division in this world. Adam and Eve were divided from God and each other. Cain and Abel were divided. Think of the division between believers and unbelievers in the days of Noah. Think of Sodom and Gomorrah. Think of the children of Israel and Pharaoh. Think of all the prophets: they spoke God’s Word and people were divided. Some believed; some refused.

The same was true throughout the New Testament. Whenever Jesus was preached, people were divided. Some believed, and some rejected the Good News. Even the thieves on the crosses on each side of Jesus were divided: one repented and was saved; the other refused.

Luke has many references to Jesus as one who brings division. Simeon said, “*Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel*” (Luke 2:34).

Jesus' entire ministry brought division, especially between the scribes and Pharisees, who rejected his teaching, and the tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners, who received him in faith.

So that's why Jesus says, ***"I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled"*** (v 49). That fire was started when Jesus died on the cross. And it has been burning ever since. Jesus didn't want division and strife. He said, ***"How I wish it were already kindled!"*** ***"I wish it were already over!"*** ***Jesus wished the fire was already kindled and the baptism was already completed. Jesus had a baptism to be baptized with—his crucifixion and death—and he couldn't wait for the words, "It is finished"*** (John 19:30).

Jesus began his ministry with a water Baptism in the Jordan, where he placed himself under God's wrath for all the world; and now he completes his ministry with a bloody baptism on the cross, the full wrath of God is placed upon him as he atones for the world.

He dreads the cross and the divisions that will come, but he doesn't shrink from the cross. He's determined.

One of the most painful effects of the Gospel is division in the family. Jesus gave an example of a family of five—a father, mother, daughter, married son, and his wife. There were two against three and three against two. Some believed in Jesus; some didn't; no one was neutral. Nothing divides a family like the Gospel. This is probably where it hurts the most. Few families have the blessing of all being together, united in Christ.

All of us have felt this pain. Take comfort, all who struggle and doubt because of the divisions. Jesus knows our pain. He knew all about divisions in the family. We don't stand alone. Once, Jesus' mother and brothers came to where he was teaching to take charge of him. They were saying that he was out of his mind. It seems that much of his own family rejected him until after the resurrection. But that didn't stop him from going to the cross. Jesus knows all about division.

Our lesson says, ***“They will be divided, father against son and son against father”*** (v 53).

Well, that’s what happened at the cross. The Father was divided against Son. The Father forsook Jesus. Not because the Son did any wrongs himself. But he bore our wrongs. Our sins divided the Father from the Son. The Son was amputated from the Father that we might be forever reconciled to God.

So how do we deal with division? Remember that Jesus knows our sadness. He was tempted in every way we are, yet was without sin. He was persecuted within his own family and hometown. He comforts us: ***“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world”*** (John 16:33). So, keep on witnessing to our loved ones not in an obnoxious way, but winsomely. Keep praying for them. Keep hearing the Word. Keep receiving the Sacrament. God will strengthen our faith through all these trials.

If we find no support in our earthly family, there is support in our church family; those united by faith in Christ are closer than blood relatives anyway. Even if we are forsaken by our biological family, we are part of the family of God.

The time is coming soon when that last great division will take place publicly on Judgment Day. Jesus will divide the sheep from the goats: believers on his right; unbelievers on the left. Then those who have courageously confessed the faith even to their unbelieving families will be confessed by Jesus to his Father:

“Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32). And take heart: in heaven there will be no more divisions, but perfect peace and unity. In Jesus’ name.

Amen