



## St John Lutheran Church

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Luke 12:49-53

"Fire, Baptism, Division"

**"I came to cast fire on the earth. How great is my distress. I have come to bring division. Households will be divided." "This is the Gospel of the Lord." Huh? Are we missing something here? This is the "Gospel" of the Lord? How is this good news? Isn't Jesus supposed to be a nice sweet Teddy bear who loves everyone...no matter what?"**

**This is one** of those Gospel readings that make you shake your head and wonder what's going on. **The Jesus we** meet here is not one that fits the image of a soft and soothing speaker who spins out platitudes that people like to hear. **But this is** the Jesus who really was... **and really is. The stereotypical Jesus** the world would like us to see is a lie...**He doesn't exist...He never did.**

**"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild"...**This is the popular image of Jesus. **Jesus strolling through** the meadows with a sheep across His shoulders. **Jesus sitting among** the children... **like the Mr. Rogers of Palestine. This is the** soft and cuddly Jesus... **the non-offensive Jesus...easy to take. Jesus teaching on the hillside... enlightening the** multitudes with a message of **"peace" and "love"...** **dispensing good** advice on how to live a more successful life. **The Jesus who loves everyone no matter what! This is a** Jesus you can build a megachurch with. **This is a** Jesus whom people of other religions...**even people of no religion...can tolerate and accept. An interfaith in offensive kind of Jesus.**

**There's one problem. This is a** Jesus who doesn't exist. **This is certainly** not the Jesus we encounter in the New Testament...**in today's** Gospel reading, where Jesus says: **"I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division."**

**"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild"?** **Hardly! Here we meet** an intense, fiery Jesus. **But this is** the same Jesus who is our Savior...**Now our Lord** speaks to us of some distressing things: **"Fire, Baptism, Division."**

**First, fire. Jesus says, "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!"** **Contrary to our synod's** poorly named and with extremely poor theology called the **"Ablaze!"** mission program... **the image** of a blazing fire is, in Scripture... **almost entirely a** negative one. **Fire, in the** biblical vocabulary... **is a sign of judgment... God's end-time judgment.**

**Of course, Jesus** did not come primarily to bring fire and judgment on the earth. **He came to** bring healing. **He came to** bring salvation and life as we are reconciled to the Father through Him. **But**

**judgment and fire are the consequence... the result... the inevitable fallout... when men reject and scorn God's one appointed way of salvation. The Gospel of John puts it like this: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."**

**So here in Luke 12 Jesus is speaking of God's fiery end-time judgment... which He Himself... Jesus... will bring to pass when He comes again as King on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead. But before that... He has something else to do... and that is actually something that will happen to Him, namely... a baptism: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!"**

**What is this "baptism" that Jesus speaks of here? A greatly distressing baptism... one that has not yet been accomplished? But had not Jesus already been baptized... at the start of his public ministry? And that baptism did not seem so distressing at the time.**

**But think about it again. When Jesus was baptized at the Jordan River... that baptism did set Him on a distressing course... a course that was not yet completed. Remember why people were being baptized at the Jordan in the first place. It was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins... people came confessing their sins. But when Jesus came to be baptized... He had no sins of His own to confess. Yet He was baptized.**

**This showed the distressing course that Jesus was setting out on. For at His baptism... Christ, the sinless Son of God, was identifying with us poor sinners... taking our sins upon Himself. Behold, the Lamb of God, who is taking up and taking away the sin of the world! A heavy load was laid on Jesus at His baptism. He walks into the Jordan River sinless and holy,,He walks out carrying your sins. He took them willingly, for you... and He would take that load of sin all the way to the cross.**

**Jesus Christ, True God... is also True Man...with true feelings and emotions. And so this way of the cross...this baptism of suffering that Jesus was undergoing...this was no walk in the park. Indeed, it hurt... deeply. "How great is my distress!" He cries out. The Greek word here has the idea of being pressed hard together. You can sense the extreme pressure Jesus was feeling! This was a very stressful experience... this baptism of suffering. Think of the agony Jesus would endure in Gethsemane.**

**"I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" This baptism would be accomplished... completed... brought to its conclusion. Again, the Greek wording is helpful. The word for "accomplished" here means to reach the goal... to finish the course. It's the same word that's used when Jesus cries out on the cross, "It is finished!" "It is accomplished, the goal has been reached." For on the cross, Jesus' baptism of suffering would be completed. There He would reach the goal and finish the course. His mission of taking up and taking away our sin was accomplished. The victory was total... the triumph complete. Sin, death, and hell were vanquished. Forgiveness, life, and salvation were won, for you. Jesus' baptism of suffering means your baptism is from death to life!**

**In our baptism... you and I** were joined to Christ and His baptism of suffering and death. **The holy cross** was signed onto us. **You were marked** as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. **Now we belong** to God and to His family, the church. **Now we are** heirs of heaven... **for we will** share in Christ's resurrection. **Now, by faith** in Christ... **our life** is different from the dead-end course of the world around us.

**This does make** us different. **And being different... being the** marked & distinctive people of God in a hostile world...**that sets** us apart... **it sets** us at odds with those who don't like God and therefore don't like us. **The lines of** judgment are being drawn... **the dividing lines.** **Jesus anticipates those** dividing lines of faith and unbelief when he says, **"Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division."**

**This has been** division long in the making... **very long indeed.** **We read about** it in the New Testament... **where many** people come to faith... **but many** others reject that faith... **either persecuting** it outright... **or perverting** the faith through false doctrine. **And that sort** of division continues to this day. **You, thank God... have been** led by the Holy Spirit to believe in Jesus Christ, your Savior... **the only** One who can rescue you from the fire of God's end-time judgment. **But many others** scorn the Christ... **they deny** the truth of His Gospel. **Not always through** outright persecution. **Sometimes through** a subtle watering down of the faith. **Sometimes through their** apathy, indifference, and neglect... **people say** "no" to Christ.

**So the dividing** lines are being drawn... **and they** cut right through the hard heart and stubborn unbelief of man. **Sometimes those dividing** lines will cut right through a family. **Jesus says:** **"From now on in one house there will be five 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."**

**Example. I know** a man from my sem. days who was a Jewish Christian. **He was raised** as an Orthodox Jew. **His name is** Eddie Balfour. **Eddie had heard** Christian preaching and was converted to Christ. **This Jewish man** then was disowned by his family for becoming a Christian. **You see, often** in Orthodox Jewish families...**any converts** to Christianity are considered effectively dead. **This is the** kind of heartbreaking opposition that Jesus was talking about when He said that a person's worst enemies would be the members of his own household.

**But again, that** opposition can be more subtle. **Family members and** friends can label you a radical because you believe the Bible...**because you** actually see the Bible as God's inerrant and inspired Word that gives life. **People can think** you very odd because you believe abortion is murder or that Jesus is actually present with His Body and Blood in His Supper...**or because** you really believe that you are going to Heaven...**or that** what the Bible teaches really does matter and that we shouldn't change what it says or means! **If you are** a committed Christian...**you will** get opposition...**people will** come after you one way or another...**and people will** try to fit you into some kind of little box with a fitting label.

**The thing is...Jesus will not fit into our neat little boxes. Jesus will not settle for a category called "religion," compartmentalized and labeled over in the corner. It's kind of arrogant on our part if we think we can make Jesus...the Very Son of God... the Prince of this universe...stand in the corner... while we go about our lives as we choose. Rather, it is Jesus who calls us to come and follow Him.**

**Indeed, as the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer once observed... "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." In your baptism... you were baptized into the death of Christ. You died: You died to sin and were raised to life... a new and different life. And people around you will be threatened by that. They may sense that they too are being called to "come and die." The old man of sin... living inside of every person... always finds new Life in Christ threatening. So you, as a flesh-and-blood reminder of that call to repentance...you may end up feeling the brunt of that person's hatred of God. Therefore do not be surprised when people are offended by you... by your God-given faith in Christ. In reality, they are being offended by the cross and by Christ Himself.**

**But as for you, dear Christian, hold tight. Cling closely to Christ and to His cross. Don't lose heart. Rather, take heart. Be encouraged today. The reason you can take heart is that there has been a baptism that will sustain you and keep you safe: It was that distressing baptism of Jesus that He did accomplish. Jesus' baptism of suffering is your baptism unto life. In Christ you are safe and sound... even in the midst of the fire. In Him you do have peace... even amid the division in the world. Our Lord came the first time "cloaking" His Divinity...He hid His Glory and Power in His humility. The next time Jesus comes...He will appear unmasked...He will be coming in all His Glory and Power to take us with Him. This is the real Jesus!**

**"Fire, Baptism, Division." Yes, there is good news here. This is indeed the Gospel of the Lord! In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...Amen**

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