

SERMON CCI Luke 12: 49- 56 Disturbing the Peace, Checking the Weather

We live in a time plagued by division. It only takes a short time watching or reading the news to know that our world is divided- divisions between nations, different forms of government, divisions between Israelis and Palestinians, divisions between religions, and tribes. In America, our government is so deeply divided between Republicans and Democrats that actual governing is at a standstill. We are divided over how to stop the mass shootings, government spending, immigration, abortion, civil rights, climate change. These divisions are not just out there, they divide families too. How many families can no longer talk about important subjects or even be together without fighting. I felt the tension this last week when my cousin and her husband visited for a couple days. As long as we didn't talk about certain topics, everything was fine. But is that real peace?

You would think that in a divided world, we could come to church on Sundays, sing a little, pray a little, and find some peace listening to Jesus. And then we get a scripture reading like today's.

The Jesus in today's scripture reading from Luke is not the one we are used to and probably not the Jesus we want. Where is the water-walking, leper-touching, God-so-loved-the-world, miracle-working, children-hugging, dying-for-me Jesus? What happened to sweet baby Jesus asleep on the hay no crying he made? This fire bringing, family dividing Jesus makes us uncomfortable.

This Jesus says he came to bring fire on the earth and he's tired of waiting. Fire in the Bible is often associated with judgment, the kind of clarity of thinking and action that burns away all the muddy, unclear, deceptive ways we try to hide what we're really about, what we really think, the divided ways we live our lives. And what's left in the ashes is the truth about us, our relationship with God, and with others. We don't like judgment; it exposes us. Fire also is seen as a refining process. Fire was used to refine metals until any fake stuff was removed and what was left is pure. Most people don't especially like being refined either; we're comfortable with a little fake stuff. So when Jesus talks about bringing fire he's talking about purifying, getting rid of all the games people play so that all that is left is God's kingdom come to earth.

But he had a baptism, an immersion, to go through first. In this story, we find Jesus and his disciples on their way to Jerusalem where Jesus knows he will be put to death because his words brought the spiritual emptiness of the religious leaders to light where all could see it. They had already begun to plan a way to get rid of him. Jesus was baptized or immersed in what he knew lay ahead, the arrest, the

trial, the beatings, and finally the cross where he would give his life even for those who hated him. He said he was constrained until it was over. The word constrained describes being immersed – almost overwhelmed – by an enormous test or time of suffering. It was being plunged over your head in an experience which could be unbearable.

If you've sat at the bedside of a loved one as they labor to breathe and need constant medication to keep the pain at bay, you have a taste of what Jesus is describing. The time for healing has passed and you face together their coming death. You dread the coming moment, the loss and grief is unbearable, so you lovingly pray that their agony will not be drawn out. That's like what Jesus is saying here. What is coming is unbearable, and he longs for it to be accomplished.

But what are we to make of Jesus' next words? "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division." He came to bring division? Don't we have enough division in our world? Let Jesus divide us from our enemies- from those who hit and hurt and lie and steal, from those who corrupt and destroy. Yes. But from our families? From our own parents and children? Fathers against sons, Mothers against daughters, mothers-in-law against daughters-in-law? And vice versa? Aren't families sacred?

Jesus isn't talking about the normal divisions that we create ourselves because we disagree about stuff, or behave badly. We do that rather well all by ourselves. Jesus is talking about the divisions that occur in families when Jesus walks into our lives. He's talking about what happens to family loyalty when he asks us to put God first in our lives. About what happens to family harmony when he asks us to choose whom we will follow which means we will not follow someone else.

There the family is sitting around the dining room table, each one minding their own business, when one person excitedly explains they've begun to follow Jesus and want everyone to come to their baptism. And the gospel hits like a ton of bricks. Division. Some want to know more, they're interested. Others want to get on with dinner in peace. After all, being a Christian is not so different from being a good citizen. You just stay out of trouble and be nice to your neighbors and say your prayers at night. There is no reason to go and make a spectacle of yourself. Others think the whole idea is preposterous. What good is religion anyway? They just want your money. And the division has started.

Or maybe you've experienced the division that can occur when someone decides they are called to be a minister, not a lawyer or teacher, and the whole

family gasps. What a waste of an education, you're too smart to be a minister. Or the mother who will not talk to her children who left the church she raised them in even though they are active members in another church in town. Or perhaps you've tried to invite your adult kids to an event or a special service here at church or you start to talk about an interesting sermon or Bible study and they tell you to keep your beliefs to yourself. They've told you before, they're not interested. Or your friends find out you were at a protest against the treatment of immigrants on the border and they ask why. And you explain that you believe God calls us to love our neighbors, including hurting people from other places. And your friends go off on you because all they see is immigrants taking away jobs and not following the law. And as much as you say you agree laws need to be followed, you believe we can still treat them with respect and care. And before you know it, you've lost your friends. Division.

Perhaps the hardest thing about Jesus' words here is that he does not say such divisions should not happen, that if we just said things right, we could keep peace; he says they are inevitable when we choose to truly follow in Jesus' footsteps- to love like Jesus loves and take our faith out of our heads and put it into action. Why are they inevitable? Because our relationship with Jesus is the most important relationship we have. It's not that the other relationships in life don't count; but only one relationship can be the most significant. When we follow Jesus, it's the relationship we allow to shape us and guide how we think and what we do; it's the relationship we allow to give us our real identity. Not the family we share chromosomes with, or the city or country we were born in, not our political party, or career, or friends. Jesus. Divisions will come when we choose to seek first the kingdom of God. There is no way to seek first the kingdom and actively live by its values and keep peace with others who go the opposite way. Keeping quiet about our faith may look like keeping peace; but the absence of conflict is not really peace. It was true for Jesus and it's true for us his followers. So don't be afraid. Keep loving like Jesus, keep speaking up for the poor and the vulnerable like Jesus, keep bringing healing to situations like Jesus, keep inviting, keep seeking the kingdom first like Jesus.

Then Jesus said, watch the weather. The people knew that when the clouds came from the west over the water, rain was on the way. They knew that when the winds come from the desert to the south, it was going to be a scorcher. So they could prepare. In the same way, if we have our spiritual eyes open, we'll recognize the time we're in. That word for time is Kairos. Kairos time is not found

on a clock or calendar. Kairos time is a moment of importance that is recognized by the heart. For example, we may not know the exact clock time, but we know the significance of the moment we said, "I do." It was a life-changing moment. Jesus asked, "Why can't you see the Kairos moment you are in?" Look at what's happening around you! The people who were opposing Jesus saw his miracles, they heard his teachings, but they missed seeing in them the significant Kairos moment when God came to earth. They could see the coming weather, but they were blind to the coming of the Son of God.

Do we ever miss the Kairos moments when God is present today? If we aren't looking for them, we will. God can place a person in our lives for us to minister to, often at an inconvenient time, and if we are not looking, we'll miss the God moment and it will pass us by. That person in line at the store who looks stressed or sad, the opportunity to give to help the victims of Dorian, the lonely neighbor next door who could use a lift, the woman overwhelmed caring for her grandkids, the child being made fun of by a bully at the bus stop. Are our eyes open? What could God do through us if every morning we prayed for the ability to see who God will place in our lives today, and when we do, to minister to them in Jesus' name? To speak up, to touch, pray together, share time with, tell about Jesus when the moment feels right, even though division may come? What Kairos moments are around us, moments of significance that can be life-changing if we see them and respond? What if that became part of what we thanked God for in the coming weeks?