

Luke 12:49-56
St Mark – August 14, 2022
The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
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At peace in Jesus

We hear three messages in our gospel reading this morning.

First, Jesus speaks of bringing fire to earth and the stress of waiting for what is coming. Next, he tells us that it is not peace, but division that he has brought to earth. Our reading ends with Jesus chastising all of us; with Jesus pointing out that we are very attentive to protecting our lives on earth while we remain ignorant about the message he brings, the message that will determine our destiny.

Jesus sounds tired. He's been at it for a while now and he's looking toward Jerusalem, toward leaving his disciples on Earth to do the work he has chosen him to do.

He sounds frustrated with their ignorance and immaturity. He knows there is still much to do before he can, once again, join with his Father in Heaven.

When Jesus speaks of bringing fire to the earth it harkens back to John the Baptist's words (Luke 3:16). John is quoted as saying,

“I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Our scriptures speak metaphorically of fire as purification or judgment (Luke 3:9, 17; Genesis 19:24; Numbers 31:23; 1 Kings 18:38-40). Jesus came to purify us all. To turn us from the ugly, hateful, and abusive ways of Satan.

Jesus came to save us all from the fires of Hell by his own death. When he says,

“I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!”

the Greek word translated as “baptized” can also be translated as “overwhelmed” and then the sentence reads,

“I have a baptism with which to be overwhelmed, and what stress I am under until it is completed!”

He is speaking of being overwhelmed by his own murder and his own resurrection. For his death on the cross will not be the end. His stress, his troubled anticipation will come to a glorious end when he conquers death.

He is looking forward to having the horror of his murder, with all of its abandonment and pain, behind him.

Most probably every one of us can remember a time when we dreaded what was to come even while we were completely committed to going through it.

Anticipating a root canal or a speech we agreed to deliver might easily come to mind. Counting the days before a possibly life saving surgery is another very stressful time.

Jesus is longing for the anticipation and stress of waiting for his chosen course to end.

The next message he delivers is a bit confusing coming from the Prince of Peace. He says,

“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”

He goes on to give some very specific examples of the divisions that will occur.

These verses remind me of Perpetua. This African woman is known by an ancient document, some of it taken from her own diary. The document tells a bit about her life and more importantly it tells about her faith.

Perpetua was born to a respected family and educated. She was about 22 years old at the time. She was married and had an infant child and she was a Christian.

She was apprehended, held, tortured, and publically killed in an amphitheater of wild animals.

She wrote in her diary about a terrible clash with her father who was not a Christian. She writes,

“we were still with the persecutors, and my father, for the sake of his affection for me, was persisting in seeking to turn me away, and to cast me down from the faith, - ‘Father,’ said I, ‘do you see... this vessel lying here to be a little pitcher, or something else?’ And he said, ‘I see it to be so.’ And I replied to him, ‘Can it be called by any

other name than what it is?' And he said, 'No.' 'Neither can I call myself anything else than what I am, a Christian.' Then my father, provoked at this saying, threw himself upon me, as if he would tear my eyes out. But he only distressed me, and went away overcome by the devil's arguments.

Perpetua goes on to tell of other times in the few days before her death that her father fought with her to abandon her faithfulness to our Lord. Father against daughter and daughter against father. Sadly, some of us have experienced this same family conflict first hand. Far less severe, but similar none-the-less.

The comfort of Jesus as the Prince of Peace does not necessarily come to us in this passage, but to those who were living when this gospel was written this passage may have actually been comforting.

These early Christians that Luke is writing to as he records his gospel are experiencing terrible divisions and hardships in their own families because of Christ.

These followers of Jesus have left their families to follow him and they are living in the division he speaks of. Jesus' words may well have helped them make sense of the turmoil they were living through.

John's gospel quotes Jesus saying,

"I have said this to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution, but take courage: I have conquered the world!" (John 16:33)

In Jesus we have peace. In the world we do not.

Finally, Jesus speaks of his followers knowing earthly things very well... all the while missing what is eternally important.

He's speaking to many whose earthly survival depends on the weather and the crops that sustain them. They know well that a south wind will bring scorching heat and that rain will follow a cloud rising in the west.

We too read signs that help us plan for our earthly future. Many of us, with keen interest follow the moves made by politicians and federal judges. We often know how financial markets move day-to-day and the impact they may have on our earthly lives. We buy gas at the station with the best price and we usually know which station that is.

When Jesus cries, “You hypocrites!” his condemnation moves from that moment directly to us today.

I’m guessing that every one of us spends more time ‘keeping up’ with what’s going on in the world around us than we do ‘keeping up’ with the kingdom of God on Earth.

When we hear stories of Christian persecution do we quickly move onto the next topic of the day or do we respond to our sisters’ and brothers’ need by praying for their deliverance from persecution and responding to ways we might be able to help?

When we see ‘entertainment’ that treats violence and sexual transgressions as casual facts of life or maybe even worse yet as humorous do we recommend it to others or do we call it out as harmful and against God’s will for us?

As our gospel reading this morning ends, Jesus asks his audience of the first century the same question that challenges us today.

“...why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

The specifics of “the present time” have changed over the centuries, but the reason we are called to study things of the spirit more diligently than things of the earth have not changed.

It is our spiritual diligence, our response to Jesus’ love, our riches toward God that will determine our destiny.

Jesus calls us to be watchful, to work faithfully, to be at peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ and to repent of all ways that do not honor God. God who is The Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We are to be known by our love for one another.

We are to be at peace in God.

We are to hold fast to our faith.

We are to put God first in our lives.