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Jesus Prepares His People for Conflict

The Savior who came to bring peace on earth and good will to people realized that his mission would also produce conflicts and chaos. He and his followers would proclaim the good news but often with pain and at a price. The long history of the Christian Church provides evidence of this battle and believers today are wise to expect it in their own lives. In the end, the hostilities will cease and Jesus will reign forever with his people.

Sermon

Luke 12:49-53

I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, 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 daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

Introduction – Can you complete this sentence: And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father...Prince of Peace, right? That's what the prophet Isaiah called the coming Savior. So can you complete this sentence: Glory to God in the highest and on earth...peace. That's what the angels sang on Christmas night. So who said this: **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you?** Jesus said that to his apostles on Thursday night before he died. One more. What were the first words Jesus spoke to his disciples on Easter Sunday evening? **Peace be with you.**

Jesus came to our world to bring peace. He ended the war that existed between God and people. He put an end to the anger God felt toward sinners and he changed the bitterness sinners felt toward God. Jesus made God and people friends. Jesus was the great peace maker and now he is the great peace keeper. And so you and I live our lives and we dream our dreams and we know for sure that we are at peace with God.

So you heard the question Jesus posed in the Gospel for today? **Do you think I came to bring peace on earth?** Yes, that's exactly what we think and that's what we believe. But that's not how Jesus answered his question. He said, **No, I tell you, but division.** OK. What's going on here?

We know that Jesus spent many hours preparing his followers for their future. In all his words, he never backed away from the reality that times would be tough. He warned them about counsels and kings. He could see prejudice and persecution. He knew they would be maimed and martyred. Christians are always at peace with God but they are usually at war with the world. Jesus knew. He said, **I have come to bring fire on the earth.**

Not my idea of a good time; not yours, either. I would much rather spend my life laughing and loving than frowning and fighting. And we try hard to make that work. No arguments, OK? No disagreements. Let's all just get together. Let's all live with one another in peace.

In these words from Luke 12, Jesus tells us point blank that it's not always going to be that way. What Jesus did here on earth will always lead to controversy and division. It will provoke public wars and private battles. It will lead families to

rupture and friendships to explode. Be ready, Jesus wants to tell us this morning. **I have come to bring fire on the earth**, he said, so...

Don't Be Surprised When the Fire Ignites

There was never a time when the Son of God did not know exactly what his mission on earth was going to be. He was to obey the law of God which human beings stopped obeying when they sinned and he was to take on the punishment they had coming. He was to be the stand-in and the substitute. He knew exactly what this would take. He called it a baptism: **I have a baptism to undergo** and it was to be a baptism by fire. Jesus was committed to this baptism, but he wasn't looking forward to it. He said, **I have a baptism to undergo and what affliction I am under until it is completed.** I can't explain to you how Jesus felt. How does a soldier feel the moment he jumps on a grenade to save his buddies? How does a mom feel when she realizes that her baby will live only if she dies? And what Jesus had coming was far worse. Forget about the pain of crucifixion. That was bad enough. But you and I can't imagine what it was like to carry the sins of the whole world and be separated from God. For God to be torn apart from God. You know what Jesus cried out on the cross: **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?** We can't know what this was like, but we maybe can understand just a little why Jesus felt this affliction. He expressed it again on that Thursday night in the Garden of Gethsemane. He told his disciples **My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.** And then he prayed: **My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.** It wasn't possible and Jesus knew it. And so he did it and he died like no one else has ever died.

That was Thursday. He died on Friday. He came back to life on Sunday. His mission was done. He appeared to his followers for forty days and he commissioned them to be his witnesses in the world. That's what they did. And that's when the fire ignited. This is no place to review 2,000 years of history. Those of you who studied Acts in Bible Class learned how the battles went in the early church. Those who studied the Revelation in Bible Class learned about the wars John could see in the future of the church. The Prince of peace brought God and people back together again but what he did tore people apart ever after. Jesus knew what was coming. **Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, 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 daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."**

Why did this happen? How could a message so sweet turn out to be so divisive and so contentious? Here's why. People don't like to be told they're wrong. If Jesus lived and died to bring peace to sinners, then people must be sinners. That's what people don't like to hear. You and I are used to confessing our sins; we do it every Sunday. But if someone accuses us of a specific sin or a pet sin, we can get defensive pretty fast. Don't call me a sinner! That's the way human creatures think. Don't tell me my idol is false. Don't tell me my life style is wrong. Don't tell me I need to come to church more often. Don't tell me I'm going to hell. The old TV preacher Robert Schuler said that he stopped preaching about the Ten Commandments because the people he preached to didn't want to hear about sin. If you're at home or with your friends or at work and you call something they do a sin, you can expect division and it won't be pretty.

Here's what else causes division: The truth that only Jesus can solve the problem of sin. Try telling your Jewish neighbor or your Muslim classmate or your agnostic brother-in-law that Jesus Christ is the only one who can bring God and people together again. You'll find out pretty fast what division looks like. St. Paul wrote that the cross is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks. The enormous majority of people in our world today—and especially young people—are absolutely convinced that there are many ways to God. If you try to insist that only Christians will be saved you will ignite an explosion that could be white hot. When you speak the truth in love, don't be surprised when the fire ignites.

What do we tell our children about fire? We hold their hand close to a stove and we say "hot" which means "don't touch." We sit around a camp fire and we say to them "Not too close." We learn from little on not to play with fire. Good idea. But too often that sense of caution and fear gets into our spiritual lives. We don't talk about spiritual things because we know what can happen. So the college kid went to Alaska in the summer to work on the fishing boats—great money but pretty loose living. His mom worried. When he came back in September, she asked, "Did they give you any

trouble because you're a Christian?" "Na," the kid said, "they never found out." He discovered the perfect plan for a peaceful summer: he never witnessed for Christ.

The fire that Jesus anticipates in today's Gospel assumes that we Christians are his witnesses, that we live and speak our faith. That we are kind but clear in our witness, that we call out sinful life styles and words, that we emphasize the importance of regular worship and Bible study, that we live here and now knowing that we will live again in the world to come. We do not accuse but we encourage. We do not scold but we tell. We do not condemn but we invite. We are willing to face the fires of division to spare people we love from the fires of hell.

The Prince of Peace came to bring peace on earth. He gives us peace unlike any peace we know on earth. He forgives our sins and adds us to the family of God. Live in that peace, love that peace, share that peace. Don't be surprised when the fires ignite but use that peace to put the flames out. Amen.