

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 23:23-29

Psalms 82

Hebrews 11:29—12:2

Luke 12:49-56

08/14/2022

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

[Jesus said:] 49 "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! 51 Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! 52 From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; 53 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." 54 He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. 55 And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. 56 You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

The Gospel of Our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Division

Good morning! We were on our way to Myrtle Beach, SC, and we had been on the road for something like 10 hours. And by “we,” I mean the Crummitt family. My dad was driving, mom was copilot, my brother and sister were in the middle, and I had the whole back row to myself. But this brought me no peace. You see, a major storm was hitting Myrtle Beach at the time, and even though we were something like 20-30 miles away, we could see the storm. And as that storm raged, another equally deadly fight was going on in the Crummitt van. “Mike! Stop driving TOWARDS the storm!,” my mother yelled. “It’s not that bad!,” my father replied. “Dad! I think those clouds are spinning!,” my sister Erin shouted. My brother Rick was joining in the fun too, and all the while I sat in the back trying to convince my family of the seriousness of my VERY full bladder. Then we realized my sister was right, those clouds WERE spinning... in fact... that’s a tornado! “Mike! You need to stop!” “Where do you want me to go! It’s still 10-20 miles away!,” my father replied. And so it went, a jolly little family vacation going the way of most family vacations, absolute chaos, both inside and outside of the vehicle. When I think of families fighting, it’s this memory that always comes to my mind. Things calmed down, we all laughed, and both the tornado and the argument resulted in only minor injuries.

But it seems that not all fights are resolved so smoothly. As Jesus seems to suggest in today’s text, he has come to instigate a division between our families. Now, I’m going to do things a little differently. Normally, I would lead you down some path of taking the text at face value, but then

pull the old switcheroo, making a different point and ending the sermon with what I can only assume would be a grand applause. But today, I'm going to spoil the ending and tell you the main point, and then we can talk about how that changes our understanding of the text.

Jesus isn't saying that he has come to bring violence and division, but rather because of the reality that the Kingdom of God will usher in, divisions will be a natural consequence. Several scholars made a similar point, but they all recognize the strangeness of what Jesus is saying, especially since early on in the Gospel, we were told that this man would bring "*peace on earth.*"¹ But I think we make a mistake in assuming that peace and complacency will go together. From the beginning, we have read that this child will bring about challenges to our current system. In the first chapter of Luke Mary sings that the Lord has "*scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.*"² We take the radical nature of those words for granted. In Luke 2, Simeon also points to the divisiveness this child will bring, saying "*This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed 35so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed — and a sword will pierce your own soul too.*"³ R. Alan Culpepper writes that "*Irony and pathos run deep, but the work of redemption inevitably brings division... Although the kingdom of God is characterized by reconciliation and peace, the announcement of that*

¹ Luke 2:14 NRSV

² Luke 1:51b-53 NRSV

³ Luke 2:34b-35 NRSV

kingdom is always divisive because it requires decision and commitment."⁴

It seems that Jesus never got the message about rocking the boat. "Jesus is 'making a difference,' even within families. Peace in the sense of the status quo is now disrupted,"⁵ Fred Craddock writes. Jesus is the kind of person to bring up religion and politics around the Thanksgiving dinner table, forcing the family to put aside social politeness in exchange for heartfelt conviction and discipline.

Luke Timothy Johnson makes a similar point, connecting the text with our first reading. He writes "*The effect of his [Jesus'] mission, he declares, is not the sort of peace by which domestic tranquility is undisturbed. Indeed, the precise point of prophetic challenge is to divide the people. Here the programmatic prophecy of Simeon in 2:35 is given its explicit fulfillment in the mouth of the prophet himself: he divides households and creates a division in the people.*"⁶ In our reading from Jeremiah we read that the prophets have held back, lying about what they see. But by doing so they have failed the traditional job of challenging the community that was the responsibility of the prophet.

Which brings us to fire. Jesus says "*I came to bring fire to the earth.*" Which, at first, seems like a pretty violent image. But we read in Jeremiah that the very word of God is like fire. And, as Culpepper writes, "*Ironically, when the fire comes upon the disciples in Acts, it is not the consuming fire of judgment but the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit.*"⁷ So, where this text

⁴ Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Volume 8. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. p. 220.

⁵ Craddock, Fred B. *Luke*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. p. 166.

⁶ Johnson, Luke T., and Daniel J. Harrington. *The Gospel of Luke*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1991. p. 209.

⁷ Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Volume 8. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. p. 220.

seemed like a very negative and condemning lesson at first, when we peel back the layers, we begin to see things differently.

So... what do we do? “Well,” Jesus says, “read the signs.” We can follow the weather patterns, how much bigger of a deal is this! It seems that the weather in that region of Israel was controlled by two forces: In the west, the Mediterranean Sea and the south/southwest a desert. So, when they saw clouds in the western sky, they knew rain was coming.⁸ Likewise, if they had a heavy wind from the south, they knew some serious heat was coming. So, if we can tell what the weather will be like, can’t we see the obvious reality that God is changing the world! And if God is at work, we cannot be complacent. It demands a response.

“12:1Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.”⁹
Amen.

⁸ Ibid. p. 221.

⁹ Hebrews 12:1-2 NRSV