

The Jesus who crashes into our personal space in this text is light years from the sugary, serene pastel portraits of a gentle Savior that adorn church hallways. We may prefer a Jesus who soothes, who comforts, who improves our lives. Our text reminds us Jesus is not so constrained when it comes to the lost.

Luke 12: 49-56 ‘I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! 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: 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.’

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. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, “There will be scorching heat”; and it happens. 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?’

Reflections

As the candles burn brightly on the altar, they remind us of the light of Christ burning in our hearts. We are comforted in knowing that Jesus is ever-present with us. But this is not the fire that Jesus is describing in Luke 12 when he says “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” With these words, Jesus points to the kind of fire that that can purify molten ore of all imperfections, turning it into gold. His fire is consuming. There is no holding back. Nothing and no one is spared. Such intense spiritual fire and passion for God’s will is his desire for us.

The words of this Luke passage are not what we anticipated that Jesus would say. We find his talk of family division kind of scary. This hard saying of Jesus challenges us beyond our comfort zone into greater clarity of faithfulness. We have to choose our response.

Some of us will find his truth hard to hear. Others will find it hard to

accept and obey. We are puzzled by the Jesus we meet this morning. While he is unchanging in divine character, our human nature cannot predict his actions or fully understand his ways. Our best response is to trust that his words are truth, and to let his truth penetrate and transform our hearts.

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Jesus came to our world with a mission: to do the will of God. Nothing less will do. Sometimes we prefer to embrace the Jesus who comforts us, but we must also embrace the Jesus who confronts us. It can be uncomfortable when his truth divides. Each one of us must take a stand about how we will follow him.

Following is tough. Sometimes I

get stuck in my faith journey. I seem to keep bumping up against the same spiritual or emotional question over and over again. I pull back when I ought to let that all consuming fire in. Jesus does not always swoop in and rescue me. He often lets me bear the situation until I will hear him and receive his fresh fire of truth. Our God does not strive to please us. He will give us the truth at any cost. No one else is capable of doing that with such love.

Jesus points out that we are able to discern the times. We can observe God at work and know the direction He is moving. When we do not observe Him, He may seem to “hit us over the head with a two by four” as I’ve heard some people describe. His message may come as a shock. Perhaps because we haven’t been listening or it’s not what we expected. Yet, he is God and we are not. While we may desire to resist the message Jesus has for us, he always speaks truth.

— Karen Heist

Readings

Sunday, August 19

Luke 12:49-56

How has the truth of Jesus challenged you to live in a different way than some of the people who are closest to you? What is your response?

Monday, August 20

Jeremiah 23:23-29

The Lord reminds his people that his Word is the ultimate test of what we should hold true. How has the word of the Lord been like fire in your life? What false understandings has it broken into pieces?

Tuesday, August 21

Psalm 82

God's judgment is his alone. He is the only one worthy of such a decision. We can trust his authority and power. While it is not our role to judge, what does God ask us to do on his behalf? How will you carry out this command today?

Wednesday, August 22

John 10:1-21

Jesus is the good shepherd. With all this talk of fire and judgment, we can lose sight of his love for us. What kind of relationship does the shepherd have with his sheep? What kind of relationship does Jesus have with you?

Thursday, August 23

John 10:22-42

Verse 27 points to the nature of relationship that Jesus has with his people. How do you listen and follow when Jesus words seem hard or painful? Take a moment to pray for a deep and growing relationship with Christ.

Friday, August 24

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

Many Christians before us have faced terrible trials, yet they have not lost faith. In what area of your life do you need to persevere with a faith like those in Hebrews 11?

Saturday, August 25

Psalm 80: 1-7

Through the cross, Jesus has taken all the Lord's anger that we deserve upon himself. We can approach God with confidence of his love. How do you need God to restore and shine upon you today? Ask him now.

Let's Serve & Invite!

This summer check out this spot for simple ideas about how to extend hope into our surrounding community. We'll share practical tips you can use at work and at play, on your own and with your family, to encourage others in the name of Christ.

Share the cool: In the heat of August, treat the neighborhood kids to ice cream, fix an air conditioner for an elderly neighbor, or offer refreshment to those who work outdoors – trash pick up crew, mail and package deliverer, the youth pushing shopping carts in the parking lot...

Got a tip?

Email: ServeandInvite@StJohnMD.org