

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost /August 18, 2019  
Luke 12:49-56/Peace through Division?  
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church  
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth?”

In our culture, being divisive is an insult that ranks right up there with being intolerant. Most people in our culture don't like division. So, today's Gospel is hard to take. Here Jesus says, “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five 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.”

How can this be? Isn't Jesus supposed to bring us together? What about the High Priestly Prayer? Jesus prayed, [John 17:20-23] “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one.” Sounds like Jesus is praying for unity and not division. How can this prayer and the words of today's Gospel come from the same Jesus?

Of course, the problem is not with Jesus; it is with people who reject the unity Jesus offers. Some reject Jesus and His teachings. Thus, they divide themselves from Jesus and from those who believe in Jesus. This division will not respect families or friendships or any other boundary of society. Jesus doesn't want division. Instead, Jesus is simply warning us division will happen in this sinful world.

The Apostle Paul also warns against such division. The Holy Spirit inspired him to write to the Romans: [Rom 16:17] “I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.” These verses teach us division results from those who teach doctrines other than the Christ Word.

Sadly, these divisions even affect the congregations of Christ’s church. These divisions often cut God’s people off from the Means of Grace. What are the Means of Grace? God’s grace comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Every time we recite one of Creeds of the church, we give an outline of the work Jesus did to give us God’s grace. This work of Jesus gives us God’s love, forgiveness, comfort, assurance, eternal life, and many other blessings too numerous to mention. The Gospel is the Good News about Jesus Christ and His work. The problem is this happened on a cross outside of Jerusalem in the First century. How do we get the Gospel from First Century Israel to twenty-first century Oakland?

That is the job of the Means of Grace. The Means of Grace are like great big Gospel pipes that pour out the Gospel on us. When we hear God’s Word or read it for ourselves, when we meditate on what it says, when we hear it in music, the Holy Spirit promises to work through that Word to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to us.

When the Gospel is combined with water according to Christ’s instructions, the Holy Spirit promises to offer all the blessings of the Gospel to us. This is especially wonderful for infants because they can’t yet understand the Gospel that flows through the pipe of God’s Word.

When the Gospel is combined with bread and wine, Jesus Christ Himself promises His very body and blood will enter our mouths with all the blessings of His Gospel. The Holy Spirit promises to use the very presence of Jesus Christ in His body and blood to strengthen our faith.

These three means of grace just pour the Gospel of Jesus Christ into us. They are like a Niagara Falls of God's blessing to us. In them are love, forgiveness, assurance, comfort, and all the other blessings we receive from the work of Jesus Christ. These are the Means of Grace; the Gospel pipes that carry the Gospel from the cross in first century Israel to you here in twenty-first century Oakland.

But what happens when a false teacher says the bread and the wine only represent the body and blood of Jesus? They are teaching the forgiveness, love, assurance, comfort, security, and all the other blessings are all just symbolic and not real. They put a valve on the Gospel pipe of the Lord's Supper and closed it off. They take the great Gospel of the Lord's Supper and mangle it into law.

There is a further danger. Cutting off one of the Gospel pipes is usually only the first step on the slippery slope leading to actual pollution of the Means of Grace.

Then there is what some people do with the Gospel pipe of Holy Baptism. Some believe this an act of obedience, as a public act to show they are followers of Christ. By saying a person must have the right attitude Holy Baptism is something we do instead of something the Holy Spirit does to us. This is saying faith is something we do instead of a loving gift from the Holy Spirit. The generous Gospel assurance of Holy Baptism is then mangled into law.

Finally, there are people who preach sermons and have devotions that never mention Christ, in His love, died to save sinners and give them forgiveness, life, and salvation. Such preaching closes the Gospel pipe of God's Word and leaves only the dry thirst of the law. Some even teach true Christians will live a life of holiness without sin here on earth. Such teachers not only close off the refreshing Gospel of God's Word, but they replace the Gospel with a harsh burden of law. In today's Gospel, Jesus warns us this world will be a divisive place. False teachers will cause divisions by trying to close the Gospel pipes of the Means of Grace. Such teachers will cause division even among the congregations of Christ's Church. Their teaching will cause division even in families. God does not cause these divisions. It is the false doctrines of false teachers who cause the divisions.

Another note about the two readings I mentioned at the beginning, remember Jesus was talking to two different audiences. Today He is speaking to a crowd following Him which had both believers and non-believers so He is addressing the believers and telling them what will happen in the future, their relationships on earth will change because of their faith in the person and work of Christ Jesus. In His High Priestly Prayer Jesus is talking about His disciples with Him in Gethsemane then and even to this day. Therefore both are true and accurate descriptions of Jesus and His teachings.

Remember Jesus gives us hope against these divisions. He said, "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" The fire in this verse is the fire of God's wrath that will fall on Him; the Baptism at His crucifixion. Jesus knew a cross was waiting for Him in Jerusalem. These words show His love is so powerful He was eager to endure the cross in order to earn forgiveness for you. This is the forgiveness of sins He offers to you through those wonderful Gospel pipes known as the Means of

Grace. Jesus gives the Means of Grace to get the Gospel and ALL its blessings from First Century Israel to all people in all places and in all times. The Holy Spirit wants to use the Means of Grace to pour the Gospel into you to establish and strengthen your faith so you will live with Jesus into all eternity. There, in eternity, there will be no division. You will all be perfectly united with Jesus Christ, the Father and the Holy Spirit to live in bliss and joy with all the other saints in the new Heavens and the Earth forever.