

Brothers and Sisters Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ...Amen. I want to start of today by going to look back at our Gospel because it is really a tough text to get a grasp on in that first reading of it. Starting with chapter 12 of Luke verse 49 you have Jesus talking to the crowd saying "'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!'" Okay, so at this point Jesus does not seem to be in a very good mood because he is talking about this fire he wants to bring to the earth and how he wishes it were kindled and then he talks of the baptism he wants to bring and how stressed out he is because it is not yet completed. But this is not the first time where the mood of one of our Gospel readings starts out like this and usually there's some message of hope so lets go on to that next verse and see what Jesus has to say.

I'm on verse 51 now and let's look at what Jesus has to say here; "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!" Okay, so maybe not the message of hope we were looking for. In fact, this verse can really make one do a double take because here Jesus is saying that he did not come to bring peace but rather division. This is not something we normally associate with Christ, this bringing of division. In fact usually we associate Jesus with the one who is to bring peace to all the nations. And if you think it gets better in the next couple of verses, well I hate to disappoint you but that's not what happens.

In fact Jesus actually goes into great detail when he states in verses 52 and 53 when he states that "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." So Jesus gets extremely specific here when he starts talking of households and families being divided amongst themselves and once again this may not what we want to be hearing from Jesus. But maybe if we go to those next couple of verses something will stand out and tie all this together in words of hope.

In verses 54 and 55 Jesus is continuing to talk to this same crowd of people where it states that "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.'" Okay so here we have Jesus complementing the people on their meteorological skills so maybe he's taking a positive turn so lets see what he says in this last verse of the section because maybe its going to be the one that ties it all together. So verse 56 closes our reading with Jesus saying to the crowd "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?" Now, maybe this was not the ending we may have been looking for in this reading. I mean he calls the folks hypocrites and tells them, and in essence us as well, that we are way to concerned with things that are out they forget what is right in front of them staring them in the face and of course Jesus is that one staring them right in the face.

This may not one of those texts you would read if you are looking to be uplifted and given hope on the first reading of it. And there's a good chance that this may not be what any of us would be looking to hear today in a world so full of hurting, despair, and suffering. So then why do we take the time to read it as part of lectionary? Why not just skip past it, better yet why

not just take a pair of scissors and cut it out of scripture? Well, unfortunately as Christians we can't just pick and choose what we like and don't like in scripture, we must read it as a whole.

You see, as Christians who subscribe to the teachings of Martin Luther we hold scripture up as our ultimate authority on faith and God and because of that, we can't just pick and choose. The reality is that Scripture does make uncomfortable at times and there is no escaping that. It confronts us not only with the harsh realities of the world, but also with our own shortcomings and as a society we don't always like to hear these things. But if we look deeper in to the text we find that there is a deeper meaning to what Jesus is saying and in essence there is a bit of hope in these words, though on a first, second, or even third reading that may not be apparent.

Let's go back and look at that opening part again where Jesus talks of bringing division rather than peace. I once heard an old saying during my bible camp days from a pastor who was speaking at our campfire worship when he said that "Jesus did not come to make us all nice, he came to conquer the power of sin, death and the power of the devil." Of course that took me a bit by surprise at first because so often we talk of the peace we receive through Christ and it was Christ who said in the beatitudes "Blessed are the peacemakers" so this took us back a bit. And yet, if you look at the message of salvation that Christ was preaching through his own death and resurrection, it really was a radical departure from the status quo and when radicals step there is no doubt people will get defensive and thus divisions start to occur. This news of salvation for all the nations through no work on one's own, but through God's work of unconditional love is one that can be scary for those folks who thought they had things cornered in the good old God market. And when people's power is threatened, of course they will do their best to hold on to it with all their might and that of course can cause division.

In fact this is just as true in a world today where we put so much emphasis on individual achievement this message of God's act of grace through Christ Jesus is one that is counter culture and when something is counteractive to the status quo, then division occurs. So then when Jesus shows up we better look out because like it or not, he's going to turn things upside down and inside out and there's no doubt that division will occur.

Now, looking at the second part of this text in verses 54-56, Jesus ends by calling the people hypocrites for being so worried about things to come and not worrying about what is right there in front of them which is Jesus Christ staring them right in the face. In doing this, what Christ is doing is reminding us of what happens when we get concerned with those things that have nothing to do with Christ and thus we start to push Jesus out of the center of our lives. And when we do this, our vision becomes clouded and we forget why we are really here at this place and that is to tell folks about Jesus. We even do this in our congregations when we get so worried about things that have nothing to do with Jesus and all of a sudden it seems like our churches are places where we spend more time worrying about the color of the carpet rather than a place where we talk about Jesus and work at carrying out his commands for us.

Therefore, when we read this text we begin to realize that Jesus is actually doing us a favor by reminding us of those things that will happen when he shows up and when we try to push him out of the center of our lives. And the good news is that he never actually talks about punishment for making these mistakes, but instead he points out the reality that his message can be divisive and what can happen when we lose sight of Christ in our lives.

You see Jesus Christ died for you and nothing can change that, but we must understand that this news of his action of unconditional love on the cross can still be divisive today. And we must remember that we must always keep Christ at the center of who we are and what we do in this world. We do this, not as a means to be a perfect people, but as a way of reminding us that

in our lives as a group of lowly and imperfect sinners, God loves us enough to create us anew and reminds us of what his message can do and what can happen when we take our focus off of Christ as the center of all we are and all we do on this earth. Amen