

“Where is the Fire???”
Sermon delivered 8-15-10
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Luke 12:49–56

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

Let's Stretch

Our Gospel lesson today is difficult. It strikes at the core of what most of us struggle with about Jesus and Christianity. This is not one of those “Jesus loves you” bumper sticker readings this morning. Christianity as we know it makes little demands on us. Being a Christian in America is easy compared with practicing and dying for your mission, like the 10 Christians who died in Afghanistan in attempt to provide eye and medical care in a remote region. Christianity in America is diluted, watered down, and sugar coated to point of appearing as just another option on the smorgasbord of our lives, with some soft words of how God loves us and we play some pretty music in the background to warm our hearts. Someone said Jesus came to comfort the afflicted, and to afflict the comfortable. Today I invite you to stretch, a kind of stretch that will transform your life.

Let us be honest with ourselves from the beginning. Most of us do not want to be transformed. Many of us prefer to hold onto our known misery against the unknown surprise God has in store for us. Most of us prefer things the way they have always been, particularly if we are over 30. We like our current judgments, assumptions and opinions, or we wouldn't guard them so closely. Many of us are stuck, trapped, and in a ghetto of doing the same thing over and over and over again. Is this message starting to get on your nerves? This getting on my nerves and I am writing it.

So, let us bite the bullet. We all have our images of Jesus as being sweet, nice, and sensitive, as one who brings “peace on earth and goodwill to all people”, as the angelic host proclaimed just a few chapters before in nativity story. But as Jesus

grows up, we see a Jesus who disrupts the social, political, and religious system and causes divisions, not peace on earth. We are called back to the reality of his mission - to establish the Kingdom of God, and transform the world. In chapter 10 Matthew, and our Gospel reading this morning from chapter 12 is a wake up call for those of us who have become complacent, comfortable, and content with the image of this sweet Jesus who accepts us just as we are. While this may be true, he never leaves us where he finds us.

Shake Up

Jesus takes us from the waters of our baptism, like the baptism of Stephen this morning, as the beginning like his own baptism in the river Jordan by John when the heavens opened and the voice declared this is my own son with whom I am well pleased to a new place, a second baptism of his death. Our baptismal life is a constant dying and rising with Christ, again and again. This is why he asked James and John if they were able to be baptized with the baptism he was being baptized with and to drink the cup he would drink from. They did, along with the other disciples. They all died a martyr's death except for John.

Jesus finds us and brings fire into our lives. Those of you who have experienced the tragedy of fire know of its awesome power to destroy. Every year the question in our state is not, "will we have fires?" but, "how big and how many." Sometimes even forest fires can produce good things - new growth, new shrubs, and opens impossible cones from trees. A common view of fire from the biblical times is one of judgment, but there are other images of fire as transformation, cleansing, and purification for new life. If you have a cavity, you want it cleaned out because of the pain it causes you. Yet if you have cancer in the soul, you are in pain and your core belief is that it comes from somewhere out there, instead of inside of you. Sometimes we live with our pain, and our way of doing life to compensate for our pain that it becomes normal and blinds us to the presence of God in our lives. Sometimes it takes the fire of God, the Holy Spirit to turn our lives upside down - to set us on fire.

What is the Difference?

Jesus says it is easier to see weather patterns and make conclusions about them. "When you see a cloud you conclude it is going to rain... when you see the south wind blowing you know there will be scorching heat" but you don't know how to interpret this present time. You don't know how to interpret the presence of God in your lives. Calling them and us "hypocrites" is a way to wake us all up. Someone said, "I can believe Noah's Ark was 500 feet long, but what difference does it make in my life?" You can believe Jesus was crucified, died, and buried, and on the third day he rose again, but what difference does it make in your life?

C.S. Lewis said that Christian people sometimes believe that, being disciples of Jesus means being like a horse that gets trained to run a little faster. He said, Jesus doesn't want a horse that runs a little faster. He wants a horse that will fly. Jesus

doesn't want to move into the house of your heart and slap on a few coats of paint. He wants to remodel our houses and build new ones. This is difficult. So, how does a horse fly? How does Jesus remodel the house of your soul? Today is the day not only to be aware of the weather patterns, but the patterns of God moving in and through your lives. Today is the present time. Today is the day of salvation and wholeness for your life. Today is the day to move from just believing in and about Jesus, to living in Jesus, and him living in you. If not today, when? If today, how? This is not a do-it-yourself project. The worst thing in the world here is willpower. You can't do it alone. When you are alone, the Evil One is powerful and nibbles away bite by bite.

Freedom

The other day a member of our church invited me to mountain bike with him Bogus Basin. On the way up we were talking about a trail called Mr. Big. He is a stronger and more confident rider than I am. So, he was riding a few hundred feet ahead of me when I came to a fork in the trail. Since we were talking about Mr. Big I thought, go down Mr. Big, well you know the trouble with assumptions. I started going faster and faster, looking for him deep in the forest. My fear came on line. I wonder if there are any bears out here. What did Bill Bryson say in his book about bears In a *Walk in the Woods*? Do the black bears just take a bite out of you and or do they have you for supper? Or is that the brown bears? What about the wolves? I wonder if they are up here? Fear.....then lo and behold my friend approached me from behind. We are called to confess to one another and bear each other.

I suspect everyone sitting here this morning and reading this has an aspect of their lives they have stuffed away in a secret room of the soul. We are fearful if anyone knew of this place they would be banned forever. We carry these sticky notes about ourselves, we re-write them, post them, and get trapped by them with the beliefs we can never rise above or beyond them to a new life. Until, by the power of God, we can face the truth about ourselves. We cannot accept the forgiveness by God, and throw it into the fire to be consumed. What is eating away at you this morning? Let us imagine we have a scapegoat up here and we place all of our sins individually and corporately on _____. Then we kick him out of the church, spit on him like the Yom Kippur liturgy of the Jewish New Year, and we are set free. In our liturgy, we say the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Takes away our brokenness, burns the garbage we carry, calls us to new life, a free life. Jesus sets you free. Now the question becomes what do you do with this freedom in Jesus Christ? Can tomorrow be different?