



Sunday, August 17, 2025
Luke 12:49-56 (Tenth Sunday after Pentecost)

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompañado

On Friday, Pastor Edwin and I met at the airport in the very, very early morning for a 5a flight to California to support Ileen and Pastor Chris and the Marien family and attend the funeral for Ileen's father, Don. We were on a Southwest flight, and if you've ever flown Southwest then you know, at least for a few more months, how the somewhat chaotic boarding process works. You don't get an assigned seat when you purchase a ticket, instead you get placed into one of four boarding groups – A through D and each group has about 60 spots. When your boarding group is called people begin to make their way to the general boarding line and then randomly begin asking others what their number is in the boarding order so they can find their correct place. People are weaving in and out and shifting order back and forth almost like an Indy 500 car race.

I was assigned A31 for this first flight and began to line up when the group was called. Pastor Edwin arrived a bit later but didn't understand the boarding process, so he got in line somewhere in the middle of the B group. I boarded and was able to save a few seats for us in row 6 and then began to get myself settled. A few minutes later Pastor Edwin tapped me on the shoulder as he was walking past, and I said, "*hey, where are you going?*" He replied by showing me his boarding pass and said, "back to row 33, seat A." It took me a moment to register what he was saying and then I said, "No, that's not how this works...you sit anywhere you like.

So, he started weaving his way back to me through the line of passengers who had continued to follow him to the back of the plane. It was a fun moment to begin our journey, and if only *this* was the kind of chaos Jesus speaks of in today's gospel.

The first chapter of Luke's Gospel proclaims that Jesus will "*guide our feet into the way of peace.*" At Jesus's birth, an angelic choir sings "*Peace on earth!*" At numerous times throughout his ministry Jesus offered various people words of peace: "*Go in peace and sin no more.*" "*Peace I leave with you.*" "*My peace I give you.*" "*I have told you these things, so that in me you might have peace.*" "*God blesses those who work for peace.*"

On any given Sunday here at Ascension and in many churches, worshippers regularly engage in a sacred practice that follows Jesus's example, "*The peace of the Lord be with you always.*" "*And also with you.*" I think it's safe to assume most of us believe that our faith is one of *peace-making and peace-keeping.*

So, then what are we to make of Jesus's shocking words in today's Gospel which seem to explode off the pages with harsh and confrontational language that sounds anything but peaceful? *I came to bring fire to the earth...Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!*



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Really...did Jesus just say that he came to bring fire and division? Not peace? Because if so, then this sounds more than just a little threatening. And I don't know about you, but I'm struggling to make sense of Jesus' words that claim outcomes of alienation and division, separation and conflict. Politics, nationalism, race, economic status, religious denomination, gun control, abortion, and immigration are just some of the most hotly debated topics. With all the divisiveness present in our world these days, it seems like the *last* thing we need is a gospel text that seems to *encourage more division*. Truthfully, it's just uncomfortable to hear. And then I wonder...is that the Gospel's problem...or ours?

These Scriptures push us to move beyond our soft and comfortable faith in order to wrestle with the hard and high costs of following Jesus. They state in disturbingly honest terms what will happen if we dare to take our faith seriously. But was this really the will of God in sending Jesus into the world? Is this *really* what was at the heart of Jesus's ministry? To make sense of the words that Jesus speaks in today's gospel I think we need to take a closer look at the bigger picture, because I just don't think that division is the end game for God. Because I wonder if there's grace and mercy and gift in the fire and division that Jesus brings. At least I'd like to believe there is. Deep down, I wish that this wasn't so, and yet Jesus offers the simple truth today that when we stand up for what matters most, not everyone will stand with us.

What would happen in our families, our communities, our churches, and our world if we allowed the "fire" of God's Word to burn through us. Because the bottom line is, if "tender Jesus, meek and mild" is what we prefer, then this week's Gospel isn't for us. If feel-good faith is the comfort zone that we refuse to leave, then we're missing out because the peace of God is about so much more than good feelings.

It means that as followers of Jesus we need to be clear and honest about the faith that we claim. And *if* we're being honest then the truth is *we don't always* appreciate the truth of the message that Jesus brings. If it doesn't fit with how we want or believe things to be, if the message is confrontational to our lifestyle or our comfort, then it's somehow not worth the effort. Yes, there is joy in living a faithful life. There is beauty and abundance. There is the promise of love, wholeness, healing, and grace. But a life of faith is also demanding, risky, and at times it causes us to have to choose one side or the other. Following Jesus means not merely embracing new beliefs, but a new way of living. This path we're called to walk must impact our values, our choices, and our priorities. And if we're honest and faithful to the leading of the Holy Spirit then we may even find ourselves at odds with those who are most important to us.

To be a follower of the one who accepted and even honored the disgraceful, means that we need to do the same – rejecting the easy temptation of judging others and instead inviting them into our lives. To be a follower of the one who preached endless and unconditional love and forgiveness, is to practice the same, particularly when it comes to those who differ from us – in



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what they believe, in the color of their skin or the language they speak, in the pronouns they use, in the political party they represent, or the economic category they fit into. And let me make one important distinction – when Jesus speaks of division rather than peace in Luke’s Gospel, he’s being *descriptive, not prescriptive*. It’s not Jesus’s desire to set fathers against sons or mothers against daughters. And it’s certainly not his will that we stir up conflict or use his words to justify violence or war.

But his words are a necessary reminder that the peace Jesus offers us is not the fake peace of denial or dishonesty. His is a truth-telling peace. The kind of deep, life-changing peace that doesn’t hesitate to break in order to mend and cut in order to heal. Jesus will name realities we don’t want named. He will upset hierarchies we’d prefer to keep intact. He will expose the lies that we tell ourselves out of fear, laziness, or unwillingness. And he will disrupt all dynamics of our relationships with ourselves and with each other that keep us from the wholeness God offers. This isn’t because Jesus wants us to suffer. It’s because he knows that real peace is worth fighting for. And so, knowing this I have to ask myself and all of us, when was the last time our faith “divided” us? When was the last time we allowed Jesus to bring us to a point of discomfort? When was the last time our faith life encouraged holy division, holy change, or holy transformation in ours or someone else’s heart?

My friends, I now hear the hard words that Jesus offers as simply a description of what can be...what’s possible. What would it be like to allow Jesus to disturb us, to unmake us, and divide us? What would it be like to experience the peace that costs, the peace that breaks, the peace that saves. Jesus will indeed “guide our feet into the way of peace.” He will. But only if we let him and then choose to follow. Thanks be to God. Amen.