

"No Peace or Know Peace?"

Luke 12:49-53

August 15, 2010

12th Sunday After Pentecost

If there is one thing that people seek out in a religion and one thing that most religions try to offer, it is peace. People want political and social peace. People want peace of mind and peace from a guilty conscience. Enter Jesus: He is called the Prince of Peace. Pictures of Jesus in Sunday School materials often show Him to be meek, almost effeminate, in appearance. His demeanor is often portrayed as calm and peaceful. His mission is described as one of bringing peace for all people.

So what are we to make of our Gospel reading for today? It seems so out of character for Jesus. He says, "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." Jesus is here to cause division and not peace? Surely, something must be wrong here.

Maybe not. Despite the fact that, on the night of Jesus' birth, the angels sang, "'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14), there is indication early on that His mission was not going to be all peace and lack of conflict. When Mary and Joseph presented the baby Jesus at the Temple, Simeon spoke, what seemed at that time, to be a very strange prophecy. He said, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." (Luke 2:34-35)

What would be the reason for this conflict and division? The Bible says, "God is not a God of disorder but of peace." (1 Cor. 14:34) So the source is not God. Rather, it was Adam and Eve who brought disorder into this world by their sin. You and I and the rest of humanity perpetuate this non-peace by every sinful word we speak, every sinful thought we think, and every sinful action we do.

The entire creation is in disorder because this. We are in conflict with God from our birth and, as a result, we are also in conflict with one another. By nature, we not only accidentally sin, but we

intentionally fight against God and His will. This angers God, something I don't think our modern society (even some of the present day churches) really believes. They view God, much as they view Jesus, as a mild-mannered, a live-and-let-live kind of deity. As a result, the idea of any sort of judgement is completely foreign to our non judgemental world. The fact that the world (and even some Christians) disregard God's anger and disbelieve His judgment does not mean they won't happen. This huge conflict must be and will be resolved.

Thus, Simeon recognized, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that this cute little baby Jesus, who had come to be the Messiah, would be a "sign spoken against". He would be opposed by sinful humanity even as He was trying to save them from their sin. He would "cause the falling and rising of many in Israel" (indeed, in the world), because the one who came to save would also be the one who would come again to judge the living and the dead.

This is why Jesus says today, "I came to cast fire on the earth and would that it were already kindled." Fire, because of its swift destructive force, is a symbol of God's wrath and judgment. With Jesus' coming, the wrath and judgment of God against sinful humanity would begin, but not in the way you would think.

Jesus throws Himself into the middle of the fray. The God-man enters the conflict between God and man. His entrance point is baptism. He says, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" "Jesus began His ministry with a water baptism in the Jordan where he placed himself under God's wrath on behalf of all humanity." (Just, p.523) From the time of His baptism onward, Jesus takes the responsibility for obeying the Law of God where Adam had failed and where we – by nature and by action – have failed. He would do right what we have done wrong in order to satisfy God's holiness.

But there's another baptism – the one which Jesus talks about in our text – which must be done, as well. "Jesus completes his ministry with a bloody 'baptism' on the cross where the full wrath of God is placed upon him as he atones for the world's sin." (Just, p. 523) On the cross, Jesus takes

on Himself the consequences for all sin for all time. He would take the punishment which was ours – death and hell - and make it His so that we might be free from both. In doing this, He satisfied God's judgment. We will not be judged because Jesus has been judged in our place. He was declared guilty so that we might be declared not guilty. He died that we might live. He rose from the dead to life so that we might live forever.

If this is true (and it is), then what are we to make of Jesus' words in our text, "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." We think peace means that all conflict ends and that everyone gets along just fine. But that's a worldly definition of peace. It is not a Biblical understanding of peace. Jesus told His disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." (John 14:27)

Jesus offers a different peace. It is not a peaceful feeling. It is not a peaceful relationship with everyone. It is something much more. It is peace with God. In our baptisms, we are tied to Jesus' baptisms. His holiness becomes our holiness. His death becomes the punishment for our sins and gives us the forgiveness for those sins. The conflict which we started with God has been ended by God through Jesus Christ. As Paul writes to the Romans, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," (Rom. 5:1).

But this peace with God does not translate into peace with other people, especially those who are not justified through faith and experiencing God's peace, too. Jesus goes on to say,

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.

Although we live in constant peace with God, we will be living in constant conflict with the people in this world, even those closest to us in our physical families. The conflict will center over Jesus – who He is and what He came to do. People will be in conflict with us because they do not

accept the Biblical concept of sin – what it is and what its consequences are. They will insist on the right to think, say, and do whatever they want regardless of what we or the Scriptures say.

Or, people will be in conflict with us because they do not accept who Jesus is as the holy Son of God, nor will they accept His cross as the solution to our problem of sin. They will reject Jesus and His cross as being weak, foolish, or irrelevant. As the Bible says, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.... Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Cor. 1:18, 22-24)

Jesus is warning us here, as He did in the chapters leading up to this text, that, just as anxiety and worry or money and possessions can distract us from the Kingdom of God, so also people, even family members, can distract us as well. And, just as we are to put aside anxiety and worry or give up money and possessions when they lead us away from the kingdom of God, we must do the same with family and close friends. We do not compromise our beliefs or our behaviors to simply to keep peace in the family or to accommodate their beliefs or actions. Jesus says, “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;” (Matt. 10:37) We may have to give up the idea of ever having peace in the family if we are going to be true to our faith in Christ. Or, we may have to give up relationships with certain family members and let them go in order that we might faithfully follow Christ.

This sounds like a very lonely proposition and is one reason we may not want to do it. But leaving behind family here does not mean are without family. We simply have a new family. One time, Jesus’ mother and brothers came to see him, but could not get through because of the crowds. Someone told Jesus, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you." Either they or the speaker perhaps felt that Jesus should show them special treatment because of because

of being physically related to them. But Jesus replies, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice." (Luke 8:19-21)

We have been born again into a new family through baptism. We have many brothers and sisters – all who confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord – under our loving Heavenly Father. Here, in this sanctuary, is where our family gets together on a regular basis. Here, we experience true peace – the peace of sins forgiven by God and the peace of reconciliation with one another which we demonstrate each week by the passing of the peace.

There is a popular bumper sticker that says No (N-O) God, No (N-O) peace; Know (K-N-O-W) God, Know (K-N-O-W) peace. If we do not know God through Jesus Christ, there is no peace, no matter what we do. However, in knowing God by faith in Jesus Christ, we can know peace in the most wonderful way. We have peace with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have peace within through the forgiveness of sins. Even though distractions and divisions within our families will result because of that peace, we have the sure promise of God: "The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.