

Sermon on Luke 12:49ff
August 18, 2013

Luke 12:49ff from the Message: “I’ve come to start a fire on the earth—how I wish it were blazing right now! I’ve come to change everything, turn everything rightside up—how I long for it to be finished! Do you think I came to smooth things over and make everything nice? Not so. I’ve come to disrupt and confront! From now on, when you find five in a house, it will be—three against two, and two against three; Father against son, and son against father; Mother against daughter, and daughter against mother; Mother-in-law against bride, and bride against mother-in-law. Then he turned to the crowd: ‘When you see clouds coming in from the west, you say, “Storm’s coming”—and you’re right. And when the wind comes out of the south, you say, “This’ll be a hot one”—and you’re right. Frauds! You know how to tell a change in the weather, so don’t tell me you can’t tell a change in the season, the God-season we’re in right now.”

In today’s Gospel reading Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem where everything that he has been experiencing will come to a head with the plot to kill him. Jesus knows this. He knows that the baptism he will soon face will not be with water, but with nails and a cross. And he’s feeling it; he’s feeling the weight and the pressure to finish what he has begun. In other words—he’s stressed! How many of us in this room today know what it means to be stressed to the breaking point?

One of the things that gives me comfort about Jesus becoming fully human is the fact that he experienced all that I will experience. He has gone there before me and he is there now to walk with me through whatever I’m going through. No, we’re not facing crucifixion, but how many of us are facing a terminal illness, a loss of a loved one, a loss of a job or decrease in wages, loneliness—you fill in the blank. Whatever it is that is tearing us apart—Jesus has been there.

So when our lives get stressed we turn to the Prince of Peace, Jesus, and yet here Jesus tells us that he hasn’t come to bring peace, but change; change that could bring conflict and division in our families just as it did in the early Christian

household. For many of the early Christians following Jesus meant a break with their blood relatives to form a relationship with the new family of followers. We who are so far removed from the time of Jesus can't comprehend how dangerous and risky this was.

For us today it's relatively easy to be a Christian. But is that because of our culture's acceptance or because we've failed to live into the gospel that Jesus calls us into? Especially in Luke, Jesus announces a new community—the kingdom of God—that is ruled not by power and might but by equality; where all those in need are cared for, where forgiveness is normal; where the poor are privileged, where wealth is shared not hoarded, and where the weak and lowly are honored.

What would it look like if we took our calling more seriously when at home, work, school or in our community? If we did, would we too experience more of the stress and division that Jesus says he came to cause? What if we were to push our community, church leaders and ourselves to stretch our budgets to care more fully for the poor? What holds us back from living in and working for the kingdom of God that Jesus describes and demands?

Part of it is fear; fear that there won't be enough time and resources for us to care for our very real responsibilities and add to that the Kingdom of God. The pressures and stresses we feel to care for our families and our jobs are very real. Jesus knows and understands these stresses. He endured his baptism of fire on the cross so that we can have the promise that wherever we are, he has already been and where Jesus is now, we shall someday be. We confess that Jesus died

for our sins and the promise of the gospel is that there is nothing we can do to lose that forgiveness or the inheritance of eternal life that Jesus has won for us.

Sometimes that promise leads us to complacency; thinking that the status quo equals peace and we do nothing because we are saved by faith. But sometimes this promise causes us to recommit ourselves to being “people of the Way,” people who strive to follow Jesus in both word and deed, filling us with fire and passion knowing that wherever the path leads us Jesus has already been there and he goes with us as we walk along it now. That path may lead us to change and conflict, at least for a time. But this path will also lead us to a deeper peace, a peace that will pass all understanding and an abundant life that comes with following Jesus.