



12th Sunday after Pentecost
September 8, 2019
Luke 12:39-43

“Jesus brings fire!”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! In the name of Jesus, dear friends in Christ, how do you feel about fire? I guess that depends, doesn't it? It depends on where that fire is, right? Fire in your camp fire, that's a good thing, fire in an out of control forest fire, bad thing. Fire on your gas stove, that's a good thing, fire in the rafters of your house, bad thing. Fire on a candle, good thing, fire on your skin, bad thing. It depends on where that fire is, doesn't?

Today, Jesus tells us He came to bring fire on the earth. I'm not sure about you, but at first glance these are tough words from our Savior's mouth. He's bringing fire, is this a good thing or not? We all want peace, right? Peace in the world, peace in our country, peace in our family. We don't want wars, we don't want wars between nations, we don't want wars between cultures, we don't want wars between religions. What are you saying Jesus? Didn't Jesus come to bring peace? Didn't the angels announce at Jesus' birth, **“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests?”** So what is it? Does Jesus bring fire or does he bring peace? What Jesus tells us here is that He brings a fire, it's a fire that brings peace, but it's also a fire that causes division.

What does Jesus tell us? **“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!”** What is Jesus talking about here? A baptism? He's already been baptized, what does he mean? Well, in a baptism something is poured out on you, normally when we think of baptism it's water that is poured on you, but here it's fire. A fire is going to be poured out on him. We still use a similar phrase, “baptism by fire.” If there's a 3rd string rookie quarterback who has to step in against the best defense in the NFL, he's going to experience a “baptism by fire” right? He's going to find out what it's like to have a 300 pound linebacker wrestle him to the ground or what it's like to throw interception after interception. He probably thinks, let's just get through with this, let's just get this done.”

So what is Jesus talking about here? What is going to be poured out on him? He's talking about his suffering and his death. The punishment of hell that he's going to take on himself on the cross, the enduring fires of physical torture and eternal torment that we'll never begin to imagine. He's talking about feeling in his very soul the burning shame for the most heinous crimes ever committed. We hear again and again about these shooters who shoot and kill innocent people, do they have any shame? Do they feel any shame for their crimes? They may not, but Jesus did! He endured their shame on the cross.

But what about us? When you're really ashamed or embarrassed, what happens? If you're really shamed, you feel heat, you feel fire right? Your face gets red, your temperature goes up. In a fit of anger we can let our language go and say hurtful things...where is our shame? We can look at things, look at images, we know are wrong and just go back to business as usual, where's our shame? We can cheat on a test and get a good grade, does that bother us? We can complain about our life even though God has blessed us in so many ways, where's our shame for such thanklessness?

For all our shame, Jesus felt it, he felt your shame and mine on the cross. He endured the fire of our shame in his body until he cried out, “It is finished, it is complete.” You see, knowing that is the only thing that can finally and totally bring peace to our hearts. We can dull our consciences and ignore our shame, we can bury our guilt somewhere deep down, but eventually it has to come out. The only thing that can really give us peace is knowing that Jesus took the fire for you. **“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”** (Isaiah 53:4-5).

Are you ashamed of the sinful things you've done in life? Am I? We should be. But you don't have to carry that shame with you to the grave. You won't have to shoulder the blame for your sins when you stand before God in heaven. You have peace with God! You have been reconciled to God through Jesus! He doesn't count your sins against you any more! Do you feel it? We're often told, "follow your heart" "let your heart speak to your head" but here, it's the other way around: here's the fact: Your sins are forgiven, Jesus took the heat, the fire for you, when your heart condemns or shames you, tell your heart to be at peace. See? The fire brings peace.

But when fire comes to something, it never leaves it the same. Jesus' words never leave someone the same. It either creates a burning zeal and joy in the heart OR it creates a burning hatred and anger against it and those who believe it. It either works faith and strengthens faith in someone OR to the person who rejects it, it hardens them and moves them to hatred against it. And because of that, because of sin, because of unbelief, because of impenitence, there won't be peace on earth.

Will there never be peace on earth? Yes, there will be. When Jesus comes again He will restore all things. People of every nation, language, tribe will stand before Jesus, there won't be any racism, any wars, any conflict, there won't be any more politics or wars, there will be perfect peace. But, it's not going to happen until Jesus returns. What does Jesus say? **"Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, 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 daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."** Wars, rumors of wars, even divisions right in families!

Why? What causes these divisions? There will always be divisions between those who believe and those who do not believe. Just try telling someone that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, that no one goes to heaven except through faith in him, people will hate you for that, they will call you intolerant, exclusive, bigoted. In fact, the world was so angry with Jesus for claiming to be the only way to heaven, that they crucified him for it.

What else? If we hold to Jesus' teachings, you're going to run into conflict. If in Christian love you point out someone's sin and call them to repentance, some will thank you, others will disdain you, "how dare you judge me!" What else? We live in a world that has no regard for what the Bible teaches. If you believe that God created the world, you're going to face conflict and division. If you believe marriage should be between one man and one woman, you're going to face conflict and division. If you believe we should share the same faith before communing at the Lord's table, you'll have people who are angry. God's word and his teaching will always cause division in this sinful world.

I have two dogs and when I give them a bone, if I try to take their bone from them, they growl, they get angry. Some people hold their convictions just as strongly and even if you're a friend or a family member, they can get quite upset if you challenge those convictions. I don't know what your family situation is like, if you have unity and peace in your family because of what you believe in Jesus and about God's Word- that's a great blessing! Thank God for that! Not every family has that. Many endure division over Jesus and His Word. If that's the case, what will you do? Ignore it? Leave it? Don't bring it up because it's best to let sleeping dogs lie? Don't make waves? Don't try? Maybe there will come a time when you have to endure such divisions silently and pray your heart out. But for the sake of the soul in danger, you have to try. For the sake of someone slipping away from Jesus, you have to try. For the sake of Jesus, who alone can bring peace to our hearts, and peace to this world, you have to say something.

But when you do, remember this: What do you have in your heart? Peace. Jesus came to endure a baptism of God's judgment for you – totally, you have peace, so you can approach someone else with peace and love, don't argue, don't raise your voice, be passionate and gentle, loving and respectful. Just bring them Jesus' words.

It's not easy, is it? Jesus has hard words for us. He wants us to know above all that there is peace between us and God through his fiery death on the cross. And there is no one in this world that wants to live in peace more than a child of God, like you and me, we know the peace that only Jesus can give. But until Jesus returns we're going to face divisions in this world, but as we do so, may the peace of Jesus be with us and guide us in all we do! Amen.