The 10th Sunday after Pentecost

August 16, 2025 at St. john’s East Moline, IL

August 17:2025

Jeremiah 23:16-29, Hebrews 11:17-31; 12:1-3, Luke 12:49-53

Title: Unity in the midst of division

Text: Luke 12:49-53

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INI

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

It happens once in a while in our lectionary, the readings, when the reading of the Holy Gospel sounds nothing like Good News. “*This is the Gospel of the Lord*” says the Pastor. In other word, “*This is the Good News of the Lord*”. Upon hearing the Good News of Jesus, the congregation, you, respond with joy saying or singing, “*Praise to You, O Christ!*”

Today’s Good News? Jesus has come to bring division on the earth.

Maybe there’s a tad bit or irony here???

Although we’re near the “Dog Days of Summer” and it’s the hustle and bustle of school beginning, we still remember the message we heard from heaven when it was cold and snowy, and all the world still and it was midnight*, “Peace on earth, good will toward men”* sang the angels at Jesus’ birth! And here Jesus is talking about bringing division?

Division. A word, a situation, we detest. From long division in mathematics to division in families, and everything in between, division is not good news. How *can* it be? Division is separation. Division is disagreement. Division can even produce tension or hostility. And Jesus says in today’s Good News that His coming will bring division into the very core of human existence—right into our own homes.

*“Home is where the heart is”.* I tin-punched and framed that phrase for my 4-H project one year. It hung in my room for the longest time—a reminder that home is to be safe, a place of refuge and togetherness, of growth and celebration, a place, where above every other places in this world but the Church, there should be peace. Much of the time, it is, thanks be to God! But home is also where our biggest disagreements, loudest arguments, and most strained, even fractured relationships occur… because of our hearts.

What about our hearts? Jeremiah the prophet confesses: *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”* Who can indeed? The Lord God alone. *And when He looks down from heaven after Noah’s Flood, He grieves that the intention of Man’s heart is evil from his youth…* the heart of division.

Our hearts, dear friends in Christ, have not lost this evil, nor are we immune from it. Thanks be to God, you, having been set free from the slavery of sin by Christ Jesus, you *have* become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed! But a battle still rages in the hearts of mankind, in our hearts. It’s a battle that desires peace above all, and will try to do whatever the heart desires to bring about peace, as each person’s sinful heart dreams their idea od peace for themselves. This is the peace that the sinful world offers… even if it means division… We look for peace in the wrong places.

Recently the ELCA in their convention, tore down a dividing wall with the Eastern Orthodox church. They did this by voting to drop the “filioque” clause from the Nicene Creed. This clause, “and the Son”, is in the phrase of the Holy Spirit, *“…who proceeds from the Father and the Son…”* This clause was the primary cause for the Great Schism of the Church to the East and West in 1054. In the past years, the ELCA (and other church bodies), has made great strides in bringing about a peace with other church bodies… but their versions of peace have overwhelmingly been at the expense of pure Biblical doctrine and truth, like this “filioque” one! Peace made with false doctrine and teachings is actually division from God.

Perhaps you’ve experience a little of this: God’s Word is straightforward and simple to understand. The teachings of His Word are always for our benefit—even if we don’t always like what He says. But how often do we approach God’s Word with our own preconceived notions, and the read them His Holy Word, trying to make God’s Word read like we want it to read, and so disagree with God’s own Word! Or maybe not us, but people we know… even in our own households, disagree over what God’s Word says. There’s no unity there… and we can’t “agree to disagree” when it’s over Gods’ Word! There’s division. Division brought about by the presence of Jesus.

Jesus, in our Good News reading today, bids us peace even though there be division. He doesn’t bring peace that the world gives, but, He is saying*, “my peace I give to you.”*

Jesus offers us a glimpse of His heart. He shares with us what He desires, and what tears Him apart. On the one hand, Jesus desires to bring about something on earth—on the other, he is distressed and torn apart as He thinks about the Baptism He must undergo.

What is the Baptism He must undergo? When Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan, that was the moment the fire started on Him. It’s ironic that it was when Jesus was in the water that the fire of judgment started burning on him. The fire of the Father’s wrath for sin. But not for his own sin, for Jesus had none. It’s the fire of judgment for our sin. From His baptism, Jesus stands under the Father’s wrath for all sin.

And what does he do while under the Father’s wrath for sin? He doesn’t send that judgment out upon others, upon sinners of his time. No, Jesus shows God’s heart by proclaiming the truth. He calls sinners to Himself. He heals. He welcomes. He forgives. He raises the dead.

With every sickness healed, every sin he forgives, every dead person he raises, Jesus is both releasing creation from its bondage to sin and absorbing into His body all sickness, sin, and death. He puts himself into the position to receive God’s wrath against sin as He releases humanity from it’s own bondage to sin. He came, to bear the fiery wrath of God’s judgment. And He wants it over.

So He went to the cross. Jesus suffered the punishment for every sin of every person, and every division sin has brought about with God. He dies on the cross under the flames and fire of God’s wrath for sinners, for you and for me… and thereby reconciles the world to God. Jesus brings PEACE with God, peace with Heaven for the world, and for you in the forgiveness of your sins… peace not that the world gives, but that Jesus alone can give.

The fire and wrath of God for sin is appeased. Jesus’ perfect life of obedience and his suffering on the cross has forged unity with God for you and all humanity—a unity thick as blood, thick as the perfect blood of Jesus… which He shares with you in the Lord’s Supper.

The other way Jesus shows you His heart is by casting fire on the earth. Not the fires of judgment, but the burning of God’s love. He pours out the Holy Spirit upon the world!

After Jesus resurrection and ascension, the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit upon the disciples so that they are filled with the Spirit and preach salvation to the ends of the earth. This is the fire by which the Kingdom of God comes to you, by which God shows His heart to the world—the fire of the Gospel still burning!

St. Paul writes in Romans, *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* JESUS brings peace on earth for those who are members of His Kingdom and who receive his heralds, his preachers, of peace in faith. *Jesus came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.* We are to Administer this peace to the world through such preaching, and through Holy Baptism into Christ’s death.

But one more point Jesus speaks of we need to address. The very good news of the cross that brings peace with God and absolves you and all who are marked with the cross in Holy Baptism ALSO brings enmity from the world and those who reject the Gospel! What causes division? Not the heart of God, but the heart of man who disagrees with God and rejects Him.

This division is a sign of judgement… which the Holy Spirit is still seeking to heal! St. Paul recognizes this kind of division, saying to the Corinthians Christians *there must be division so that you can know who and what is actually right!* (1 Cor. 11:19). The Gospel of Peace will divide. Strange to hear, maybe, but it’s better to have division over Christ here on earth—even with family members, as difficult as that division can be—than to have eternal division on judgment day. Division gives an opportunity to show what is true. While still alive on this earth, those who are divided from the truth are still able to hear of Jesus, His Word, and repent, believe and live!

And you do not stand alone. Even if opposed, forsaken, maybe even persecuted by family members, you are part of the family of God… part of His own household—here, where the Heart of God brings you home.

And that’s the peace you have. *Peace that comes from sins forgiven. Joy that lifts your soul to heaven.* You are reconciled to God in Christ. You are united with all believers throughout the world in the one true faith as we live under the all-sufficient grace of Christ. Yours is the peace that passes all understanding, yet it’s the peace that keeps your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. God alone gives you this peace to your heart and conscience, by grace bestowed, and proofs here of God’s favor shown to you in Word and Sacrament.

And when you do experience division due to Jesus, when you do take a stand for the truth and suffer from blowback and fallout of division, you yet still have peace because of Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews says: “*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses*—all those who share the peace of Jesus both in their example and life—*let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*  And when division occurs because of this, then also *“consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted*” (12:3).

God has given you a new heart, and a new spirit—His heart and His Spirit. A heart cleansed of sin, and the Spirit to lead and guide and strengthen you in faith, love, and steadfastness until the day Christ calls you to himself. Remain in Christ, remain in His Word, and you will not be put to shame on the day of His coming… but will have everlasting life. *This is the Gospel of the Lord. Praise to You, O Christ!* AMEN*.*

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesu until the Day of Everlasting life. Amen.

SDG

Some helps from 1715 Craft of Preaching and from Concordia Commentary on Luke