

The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 22, 2010
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 12:49-52

***"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 how distressed I am until it is completed! 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."* (NIV)**

Have you ever heard the expression or seen a call for “*a division of the house?*” If any of the men here have served at district or synod convention they would know that most of the voting is simply done by voice votes. People say a simple yes or no, for or against, and a comfortable majority decides. But every once in a while there is an issue that gets some heated discussion, an issue where both sides present their case, and people are strongly on one side or another. When the outcome of a voice vote becomes too difficult to tell, there is a call for a division of the house. This is a method that puts pressure on people because a division of the house forces you to take a stand. You have to stand up and be counted. That could be a tough thing, maybe even a little embarrassing if you are a congressman voting yourself another pay raise. That takes courage, and, at times, can be a little agonizing when you need to take a stand by casting a vote you believe is right when you know it will be unpopular.

Dear friends, this morning we are reminded this is the kind of division that takes place when disciples follow their Lord. He asks each one of us to stand up and be counted. God, our Savior, makes it vividly clear that: ***“He who is not with me is against me”*** (Matthew 12:30). There is no middle ground when it comes to Jesus. There is no standing on the fence. Today, Jesus words remind us of an eye opening truth: **Christ causes a division of the house.**

At first glance the words before us might sound somewhat surprising, even a bit shocking. In fact, I read this text to my wife Lisa earlier this week and she asked “*Where do those words come from?*” I smartly replied: “*Jesus.*” But in all seriousness, we usually think of Jesus coming to bring peace and love and unity to earth, don’t we? But here Jesus talks about bringing fire. Here Jesus speaks about causing division. How can the One upon whose birth the angels declared: ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests,”*** how could the One whom Isaiah foretold as the ***“Prince of Peace,”*** now say: ***“Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division?”***

Let me ask you this: does the dentist cause pain or relief from pain? Does the doctor and surgeon hurt or heal? Does Christ bring division or peace? The answer to all three of course is both. That is something the elder Simeon understood when held the infant Christ in his arms and said: ***“Sovereign Lord...you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation,”*** but then, in the same breath, proclaimed:

"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, (while saying to Mary, Jesus' mother)... and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

So I pray we too understand the point Jesus is making when he says: ***"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!"*** Jesus knows that what He came to do will cause a division of the house. Jesus came to be the Savior for all people. Jesus lived and died and rose again for all people. Jesus opened the door to heaven for all people. The good news of salvation in Christ Jesus will be sent into all the world. Yet, the truth Jesus is getting across today is that not all will believe the good news. While there will be those who believe and are baptized. There will be others who do not believe. There will be those who oppose God's people and want to hinder the work of Jesus and His church. Jesus is making sure the disciples know that life on earth is not always going to be easy. Jesus' disciples will be persecuted, hated, and mistreated.

In fact, the reality will be that many times there will literally be a division of the house. Jesus says, ***"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."***

This is really kind of sad to think about families being divided and against each other. But it is a great reminder for us that each soul that sins is the one who will die. Faith in Jesus is an individual thing. The faith of the parents does not count for the children nor vice versa. Ever hear people talk that way? *"I don't go to church, but my mother never misses a Sunday or all my is Christian."* They almost talk as if they are somehow covered.

But the truth is that each and every person individually will be divided into one of only two groups. Sheep on one side and goats on the other. It will be believers against unbelievers. As Paul writes some will view Christ as the fragrance of life but to others He will be the smell of death. Christ will be the cornerstone for certain people, but a stumbling stone to different people. This will even take place among immediate families. Missionaries in Africa tell stories about how when people become Christian they decide not to join in some of the pagan rituals and customs. Their families often become very angry and accuse the Christian of showing dishonor to his family, his elders, his forefathers and his clan. When one or two are Christians and the others unbelievers the family becomes very divided.

That is what Jesus is getting at here. Inside and outside of our homes there will be divisions. Following Jesus may leave us looking across a dividing line, even at loved ones very close to us. We will face name calling and hatred and persecution. We might be tempted to even give up our faith just in order to get away from this sad situation. When we start to think or feel this way let us quickly turn our eyes once again to Jesus, ***"the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"*** (Hebrews 12) Jesus knew that His coming would cause this fire and division. Yet, in love Jesus came for us. Jesus endured for us.

Listen to what Jesus knew must be done. ***"But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!"*** Jesus was not talking about His literal baptism that was already done by John the Baptist at the Jordan river. Jesus is talking figuratively - the way I heard a college football coach use it this week talking about his

young quarterback being baptized - by being thrown into the fire so to speak. But this baptism Jesus had to undergo was much tougher than playing quarterback. In fact, what laid ahead for Christ was much tougher and more agonizing than anything anyone ever went through or ever will. For Jesus would endure the fire of hell for all sin. Jesus would suffer God's wrath. Jesus would be punished, not for His own sins, but for the sins of the world - for your sins and mine. Before the victory of the empty tomb, there was death on a cross. Yet, in love, Jesus would not be turned away from His mission of bringing salvation for you and me and all people. It is finished.

So while there may be a division of the house, there is no longer any division between God and His children. While in this world we may have to deal with strife and anger and hatred, we are at peace with God through sins forgiven. While we may suffer and be persecuted for Jesus here, we know our Savior is in heaven preparing a glory for us that outweighs all our troubles. While even family members may make us sad, we have the joy of being members of the greatest family of all - a family of faith - God's family.

Therefore, fellow believers, may we boldly stand up and be counted. May we make it clear what side of the fence we are on no matter who is on the other side. There is no middle ground when it comes to Jesus. Christ causes a division of the house. Thankfully, by His grace Jesus has put us on His side, the victorious side, the side we pray we always remain and the side we pray many others are brought to through the gospel. Amen.