

# **“A DIVISION IN THE HOUSE”**

**Luke 12:49-53 - Proper 15-C**

**August 14, 2016**

A ten year old girl was becoming very upset one Sunday at the noon meal in her home, although she was trying her best not to show it! Why was she becoming upset? Because it was now that time during the Sunday noon meal, when her father would begin to offer up his weekly critique of the worship service the family had attended together earlier that morning.

Unfortunately, this young girl's father had much more of a “negative” outlook rather than a “positive” outlook on life. So he'd say such things as: “Wow! The pastor really tried to act like a BIG SHOT in the pulpit today didn't he? Or, he might say: “The choir really “murdered” their anthem today, didn't they? There were times also when not even the organist would be spared from her father's direct line of fire. “And the organist, she really ‘drowned’ out all of the congregational singing completely today didn't she—because the volume level set on the organ was just too high!?!”

I wish I could have been there to share with this girl's father the words of St. Paul in Philippians 4, verse 8: *“Finally my brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is commendable—if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things and the God of peace will be with you!”*

So having said this as a backdrop, what really is going on with Jesus in the words of our Gospel lesson this day!?! These words certainly do not sound to us initially, do they, like the words of the Jesus whom we have all come to know and love by the grace of God?

This is the Jesus who was speaking to a very large crowd that day—who had first cautioned those who were rich in the things of this world—against becoming so focused only on the acquisition of more wealth—that they would end up totally neglecting their relationship with God!

But now, in verses 22-32, Jesus next speaks to those people who were on the other end of the socio-economic ladder, who were often left wondering where their next meal might have come from. To these would-be disciples Jesus does everything he can to alleviate their needless fear and worry!

He said: *“Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap! They have neither a storehouse nor a barn and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them.*

*Consider the lilies, how they grow! They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these! If God so clothes the grass of the field which is alive today and thrown into the oven tomorrow, how much more will he not clothe you...and provide for all of your needs” (Luke 12:22-31)?*

Jesus has just said to his followers: *“Do not fear little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32)!*

And now, it almost seems to us as if our beloved Jesus, the Holy Son of God, is doing a complete 180, doesn't it? The One whose words were doing so much to alleviate fear—all of a sudden, now becomes the One whose words seem to actually be striking fear in the hearts and minds of his captive audience there that day! Was Jesus now turning the tables on everyone present?

Was Jesus now assuming a new identity as a: “Self-Proclaimed Trouble Maker”?

In the very next breath Jesus announces: *“I came to cast fire on the earth and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you but rather division!”*

How can we reconcile the “don’t worry” and the “don’t fear” sayings of Jesus in Luke 12 with the “*Do you think that I have come to bring peace on earth, no, but division*” sayings of Jesus in this same chapter.

Perhaps some analogies may be helpful to us here!

Have you ever heard that old saying: “Sometimes things have to get worse before they get better!”? If there’s a problem in your life that needs to be solved—you know that that problem is not going to solve itself. If there is a predicament in your life that you are facing—you cannot deal with it adequately, simply by trying to “sweep that predicament under the rug!”

Sometimes things must get worse before they get better!

I hope that I am not too far off base, but think about your favorite dentist! Does your dentist bring you pain or alleviate your pain? Of course his goal is to relieve your pain—although he may cause you some additional pain, initially, while he extracting your abscessed tooth or performing a root canal on your first!

Perhaps the life-saving work of a skilled surgeon provides us with a better analogy! Does that surgeon cause you pain when he performs that heart bypass operation on you, or does he work to take away all of those chest pains and also those times scary times when you are experiencing a real shortness of breath? Does that orthopedic doctor cause you pain, or relieve your pain, when he replaces that old hip of your with a new hip, or that old knee of yours with a new knee?

Jesus certainly knew that with respect to his own life and saving mission in this world, even for him, things had to get worse, far worse, much worse, before they would get better! Back in Luke 9:22, Luke begins that section of his Gospel account that theologians have always referred to as Luke “Travel Narrative.” This is the Jesus who openly pronounces: “*The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised*” (Luke 9:22)!

Spiritually speaking, this is true too! It’s not easy for any of us really to let the law or God go to work for us as individuals in our lives! Making an honest assessment of our lives can really be painful, yet it can be very rewarding too!

Listen to the words of King David in Psalm 32: “*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away, through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me. My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. THEN I ACKNOWLEDGED MY SIN TO YOU AND I DID NOT COVER MY INIQUITY. I SAID, “I WILL CONFESS MY TRANSGRESSIONS UNTO THE LORD AND YOU FORGAVE ME THE INIQUITY OF MY SIN!”*”

*Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean! Wash me and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the ones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity!”*

Sometimes things have to get worse before they get better! And those who want to know the fullest joy of a life that’s being lived out in a loving relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, may have to suffer some persecution and experience some painful rejection from other people, people who are near and dear to them along the way!

There are times when Jesus will call upon us to stand up and be counted! Yes, his goal is always to enrich our lives—to call us to faith—and to strengthen our faith—and to make us much stronger people as we go through this life because of our faith—but we can’t expect to do without experiencing a little suffering along the way!

Those people who are well-versed in the art of politics know that among any legislative bodies, such as the United States Congress or the House of Parliament in Great Britain that there is well-known parliamentary procedure that is often referred to as: “A Call for a Division of the House,” or simply a “Division of the House!”

Sometimes when a vote is taken and the moderator calls for a voice vote by saying: “Those who are in favor of the resolution say: “I,” and those who are in favor of the resolution say: “No!”

Sometimes it’s very obvious if the “I” have it or the “Nos” have won the day. But other times the distinction is not all that clear. That’s when the person running the meeting will call for a “Division of the House.”

People have to stand up and be counted on both side!

And when we stand up publicly as witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, others around us will take notice too! Though our Lord Jesus Christ entered this world to reconcile us sinners to his Heavenly Father, our response to the Gospel can cause some pretty sharp division among us too—especially divisions between us and what some people might call our “blood” relatives! People must take a stand about him; either they are for him or they are against him! Everyone must take a stand and live with the consequences, or at times, simply avoid him altogether!

Though, as Christians, we believe that Jesus was born into this world to be our Redeemer of a lost and fallen world, though we believe there is only One Mediator between God and man the Lord Jesus Christ who loved us and gave himself up for us all, there certainly are times for many of us also when Christ becomes a point of division in our lives! *“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 daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law (vv. 52-53).*

*“I came to cast fire on the earth and would that it were already kindled” (v. 49)!*

Fire, as we all know, can be good or bad, but like water, fire cannot be ignored!

It was fire that Moses saw in the burning bush at the time of God’s self-revelation to him. It was a pillar of fire by night which hovered over the people of Israel for forty years during the time of their wilderness wanderings; signifying that God was indeed with them.

It was fire, in the form of a piping-hot coal that the angel took off the altar, touching Isaiah’s lips with it, to cleanse him from sin and to declare his sins as now all forgiven!

It was fire that fell from heaven and consumed the Prophet Elijah’s sacrifice on Mount Carmel. And did you hear Jeremiah say it in the words of our Old Testament lesson today: *“Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces” (Jeremiah 16:29)!*

Of course, you and I could “decide” for Christ until we were blue in the face, and it wouldn’t do us even one teeny, tiny ounce of good—except for the fact that Christ has already decided for you and me! Because of our Savior’s sacrificial death, there is no longer any division between God and his people, but among people as a whole, of course, there is! I love those magnificent words of the hymn writer:

*Lord, ‘tis not that I did choose thee, that I know could never be!  
For this heart would still refuse thee, had thy grace not chosen me!  
Thou hast from the sin that stained me, washed and cleansed and set me free!  
And unto this end ordained me—that I ever live with thee!’*

*It was grace in Christ that called me, Taught my darkened heart and mind;  
Else the world had yet enthralled me to thy heavenly glories blind  
Now I worship none above thee, for thy grace alone I thirst,  
Knowing well that if I love thee, thou, O Lord didst love me first!*

So can you get what the LORD JESUS is driving at for all of us who are still his disciples today by his resurrection power? Christ is calling upon everyone here again today seated together in this sanctuary for

a division of the house. Day by day and moment by moment, he calls us to take a stand, to declare not only our belief in him, but to live out what that commitment to him might mean for each one of us in our daily lives!

I do like the little story I had heard some years ago about a chicken and pig that were walking down a road one day on a beautiful Sunday, when they walked by this little country church that had more cars parked around it than either of them had ever seen before. Outside of the church and close to the road, there was stations that day a very special sign that had no doubt been prepared for the church by professionals. It said, "Free breakfast to all who worship with us this beautiful Sunday morning!"

That's when the chicken walking down the road, elbowed the pig that was walking down the road with the chicken's right wing. Then the chicken proceeded to say to the pig: "Hey let's stop offer here and the church this beautiful Easter morning and see if there isn't anything that we might not do to help out!"

But that pig was no dummy! Turning his faces towards the chicken, he said: "That's easy for you to say! All those church people might require of you is a little donation, but from me, they'd expect nothing than a total commitment!"

And you know why—there's no threat to a chicken's life usually when she lays an egg, but when a pig is turned into bacon—now that a totally different kind of sacrifice all together!

God still calls upon us to present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God today! But he also says the rewards that will come our way are more than worth it! Let me close with some words of St. Paul in Romans 12:1-2, "*And so, dear brothers, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living sacrifice—holy—the kind he can accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but be a new and different person with a fresh newness in all you do and think. Then you will know the will of the Lord for your life and discover a great sense of satisfaction in your lives by doing it!*" Amen