

Luke 12:49-56
August 14, 2016

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

It seems that everywhere we look these days there is division. We watch it play out daily in some very ugly ways as our presidential candidates hurl accusation after accusation at each other creating an even further divide between the two parties and even division within their own respective parties. Division continues to fester itself in acts of racism and sexism. Division continues as the gap in our country between rich and poor widens. Division even runs rampant in our churches as at times we cling so tightly to our own doctrines and beliefs that we simply won't listen or be open to those of another denomination or even another sister or brother in Christ within our own congregations. Division happens when rather than confront another brother and sister about how they may have wronged us we instead turn to parking lot gossip, which instead of closing the gap created only widens the chasm between us. Yes, division is all around us and most of the division in the world is a result of the stain of sin on the human condition. Division that comes about from fear – fear of the other who appears different than us, fear of change, fear of losing that which we cling to so tightly for security that we create walls of protection which keep others out, fear created when we place blame on someone else or a group of people and identify them as the source of what is wrong in the world instead of acknowledging our own limitations and

contributions to whatever anxiety, pain, or hardship we may be experiencing. Division created when we scapegoat our neighbor. We all do it in some way, shape, or form and who became the ultimate scapegoat for the world – Jesus in the baptism of his crucifixion and death he speaks about in our gospel lesson.

Yes, we live out division daily in a multitude of different ways and so we come to church to hopefully find words of unity and peace in the midst of all that separates us one from another. We long for a glimmer of hope and encouragement to push onward. And then we hear just the opposite come out of Jesus' mouth. And the division he speaks of gets right at the heart of what often is most important to us in life – family. In some ways these words Jesus utters are fightin' words because I suspect many of us would do just about anything to protect our family. Yet, here comes Jesus saying that he came to bring division. Even into the most sacred of places in our lives. Yet, I don't think Jesus is dishonoring family with his words because indeed our families can be a great conduit for which the Holy Spirit to bring about and instill in us the faith to believe in Jesus. Our families can be a source of great support in our walk of faith. Our families are indeed made up of the great cloud of witnesses we hear about in our text from Hebrews which help us persevere in the midst of hardships and momentary bouts where our faith wavers. Our families at times are the very presence of the Holy Spirit that intercede with prayer for us when we are unable to.

I can confidently say that I would not be here today as your pastor or any other congregation's pastor for that matter without family. You have no idea how many times I wanted to quit seminary. How many times I would come home and say I couldn't do it. That I wasn't smart enough or qualified enough or strong enough. There had to be someone better. As wave after wave of doubt, depression, and angst bombarded me one person continued to calm the storm, be Christ to me, lift me back up, speak words of encouragement, and absolutely never give up on me or say what I was doing was nothing but a pipedream as so many others, including family, did. Yes, that was my wife. She gave up so much: a job, friends, closeness to her family, and for the first two years of seminary was for the most part a single mom raising our two young children, working full-time, and being the biggest cheerleader I have ever had.

Thus family isn't the bad thing we might conjure up upon an initial reading of this text. Family isn't always an obstacle in our response to answer the call to discipleship. Yet, at other times, we can cling so tightly to protecting our family unit and relying solely on them for life that we do in fact place our relationship with the One who brings life in a secondary position. Jesus is saying following Him will indeed require sacrifice. He is saying that faith will at times lead to difficult choices that may bring consequences that cause us great pain. Those things we so desperately cling to for security, for life, for happiness, for success – those things at times we have to let go of and leave behind. We have to get out of the boat which is our safety net and jump into the midst of

frightening waters in order to truly be transformed and encounter the fullness of God's grace. And one of those may in fact be familial bonds. This is the division Jesus is talking about. It's tough stuff. The division Jesus is talking about is brought about solely by following him. It's a hard division; yet, it is ultimately a good division.

The division we so often see in the world and create in our own lives is brought about by sin. It's generally not healthy division. It's division that creates walls. It's division that tears down the other and often sees them as something other than created in God's image. It's division that causes great pain. It's division often derived from greed, hatred, envy, fear, and insecurity. This is not the division Jesus came to bring. We know that because we must look at the whole of His ministry if we think that kind of division is His work. Jesus didn't shy away from the other? No, he buddied up to the table and ate with them. Jesus didn't hate those who disagreed with him and even sent him to his death. No he prayed for them and offered words of forgiveness. Jesus didn't come to save just a few? No, he came to redeem all and through his death and resurrection he draws all people unto himself. Jesus didn't come saying God's grace was only open to a select few. No he came to reveal God's love and grace to all and reveal that each and every person is indeed created in the image of God. Yes, His way of justice, peace, love, and forgiveness is at times grossly counter-cultural and if we live by it may in fact cut us off from those nearest to us; however, his way will lead us to the

fountain of everlasting life, the vat of unending forgiveness, and the arms of God's unfailing love. Amen.