

Luke 12:49-56

August 14, 2022

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

Often, we will hear about someone being on fire. Not in a literal sense, but figuratively speaking. For instance, a sportscaster might say a basketball player is warming up to the point she becomes on fire, meaning she can't miss. Every shot is dropping. I think back to the Michigan game this past year when Caitlyn Clark was splashing 3-point baskets from seeming everywhere on the court in the third quarter. Or, perhaps it's a pitcher in baseball in which everything is clicking. The strike zone for that game has seemed to expand and he can't miss. He's on fire with his best stuff. Likewise, we might say someone is on fire for a specific cause. She is filled with a passion, a desire to get the word out. Perhaps, it's to eradicate hunger. Or maybe it's a particular social issue. He is striving for change. Maybe the individual is on fire for Jesus. To proclaim the good news.

We might say Jesus is on fire. He is filled with a passion to bring near the kingdom of God. To reveal it. He is on fire to change lives. Free people from the stain of sin. Cast aside all powers that thwart God's will and draw humanity away from God and the fullness of his love and a relationship with him. Jesus says, "I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled." He has a desire that whatever this fire is, it burns right now to its fullest.

He also goes on to say a word that seems to run so counter to the gospel we have come to cling to. The gospel he has revealed. The gospel the Spirit has breathed into us. The gospel of inclusivity. The

gospel of grace, love, reconciliation, forgiveness, eternal life. This is where we place all hope in a world that is so divided.

“Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.” This is not what we have come to hear. This is not the world needs more of. This is not the gospel we know. We long not for more division but rather for more unity. Is not Paul intent on lifting up the unity we have in Christ Jesus. Are not the fruits of the Spirit produced as a result of the grace of God in Jesus Christ intent on fostering peace, building up the church, bearing forth love that casts aside the fires that separate us from God and one another? Those fires that so often consume. Fires of pride, power, control, greed, envy, revenge and the like. Fires of sin and evil.

We know Jesus is about peace. That is the way of God. Zechariah prophesied about his son John (the Baptist), the forerunner of Jesus as he said John would go before Jesus to “guide our feet into the way of peace.” The angels, as they come to proclaim the birth of Jesus to the shepherds praise God and say, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those who he favors.”

Following many of Jesus’ healings he dismisses the individual saying, “Your faith has saved you, go in peace.” Just weeks ago we heard the story of Jesus sending the 70 out and telling them when they enter a house they are to announce words of peace. Be bearers of Christ’s peace. Following his death and resurrection, Jesus meets the disciples locked in their houses and his first words are, “Peace be with you.” In the fire of the fear the grips them, he speaks the fire of peace that will extinguish that fear.

We have come to know Jesus as the Prince of Peace. So indeed, the gospel of Jesus Christ. The mission of God is to bring about peace.

So what is Jesus getting at? First let's talk about this fire. Fire is representative of many things in the Bible. At first glance, we may think it is the fire of judgement. But fire was also used to represent God's presence. Remember the pillar of fire that went with God's people in Exodus. Or the burning bush Moses encountered God. Or perhaps it's the flames of the Spirit that descended upon the people in Acts on Pentecost.

Is this what Jesus is longing to be kindled? The presence of God in the world. People turning from all those other fires that burn within us, that are kindled in our hearts and minds that seek to turn us from God. The fire of sin Jesus came to dispel.

How many times does Jesus give us a parable about what the kingdom is like? How many times does he say it is breaking in here and now? Jesus burns with a passion to bring the fullness of God's kingdom to fruition. To cleanse our hearts from sin and death. To turn us to God and his ways, his will.

The gospel as Mary proclaims in her Magnificat will scatter the proud, bring down the powerful from their thrones and will lift up the lowly. It will fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty.

Or as we hear Jesus' teaching in Luke 6, what we know as the Beatitudes, the kingdom Jesus desires to usher in will, "bless the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God." It will bless the hungry, who will be filled. It will bless those who weep, for they will laugh. It will bless those

who are persecuted, excluded and reviled. For theirs too will be the kingdom of God.

The gospel of peace may ultimately bring about division. Because it is the gospel of change that runs so counter to the gospels of prosperity, wealth, and power. This is the division Jesus is speaking too. His disciples surely encountered it. Luke's community lived it. When have you encountered it, the cost of following Jesus.

Jesus has a passion. He is on fire to bring forth kingdom of God. This is his mission. His purpose. The fires of the world will ultimately lead to the baptism of his suffering and death. The fires that seek to prevent the gospel of peace, forgiveness, inclusivity, freedom of the oppressed, etc. and kingdom of God to break in. Thankfully, the fire of God's love. The fire of God's reconciling and life-saving work will prevail through his death and resurrection.

This is our hope.