

August 15, 2010

Scripture: Luke 12: 49-56

Sermon: "A House Divided"

We have hit the hot summer months and that means forest fires. We have heard stories throughout all summer about forest fires in various points in our nation and even in our world. We have heard about how the land was charred and burnt. We seen images of blackened trees and ground. It appears as if these areas will never recover from the damage done from the forest. The fires have seem to destroy these areas.

These images remain vivid in my mind as I came across an article about forest fires. It was titled: "Life after the Fire". This article was shining a new light on the good that comes from forest fires. It said that the heat from the burning will actually help the cone bearing trees. The heat and fire will open the cones and release the seeds. That the closed cone is opened by fire And within a month, the seeds will begin to germinate and re-grow the forest.

I thought this was fascinating until I read the next line in the article. It said that forest trees needed to be exposed to fire every 50 to 100 years to invigorate new growth. That suppressing the fire would actually be detrimental to the forests because the dead trees and other items would just create a tinderbox and destroy the new growth that is trying to live in the forest. Forests need to be exposed to fire every 50-100 years to invigorate new growth. And I thought just like the church. The church needs to have the opportunity the "burn" away the dead branches and things that are preventing the new growth from happening.

Life after the fire. Burning away the dead. Invigorating new growth.

That is what our Scriptures are about today. We continue our story from last week. Jesus is still giving last minute instructions to his disciples about the cost and purpose of discipleship. He is trying to get them to look at the big picture of his ministry.

"Guys, I have come with a purpose. I have come to spark the fire that will cleanse the people of God. I have come to light the fire that will judge the children of God. I have come to ignite the fire that will purify the community of faith. And once this fire burns across the earth, once it burns away the death that holds you back, new life and new growth can flourish. Once this fire that will cleanse and will judge is contained, yes, the ground will look black. Yes, the ground will be charred. It may appear that this earth will never recover from this cleansing fire. But just wait! The seeds of new life will be released. The seeds of hope and justice will take root in the blackened soil and soon you will see new growth. You will see new life coming forth.

There will be life after this fire! It will burn away the darkness and death. This fire will bring new life and new growth.

There will be new life after this fire!

As followers of God, we get excited by this image of a cleansing fire! We shout, "Alright, Jesus bring it on! We are ready. Send this fire to cleanse and to purify! Bring it on!"

And Jesus answers our shouts by saying “Do you think that I have come to bring peace to earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.” This will not be a calming fire. This fire will bring Chaos. This fire will bring division. This fire will bring pain.

And as followers of Jesus, we stand beside the disciples just as confused and lost in understanding, and we assume that something got lost in translation.

This is not a Jesus that we know or want to claim. And we try to straighten Jesus out: Jesus, I am sorry to say but you’ve got it wrong. You are supposed to bring peace. It says so right here. The angels at your birth told us that you would bring peace on earth and goodwill to man. And you do have the name Prince of Peace. So sorry to say, but you might want to check your notes again before you start saying crazy things like that. Bring division. It’s okay, Jesus, just don’t let it happen again.

And Jesus once again answers our comments by saying: “Listen to me. You just don’t get it. You can see what is going on around you because it is what you want to see. You can notice the clouds and say it will rain. You notice the south wind and you know that there will be a burning heat. You heard the angels sing of Peace on earth and you expect a time where there will be no conflict. You say I am the Prince of Peace, meek and mild and I say that you see and hear only what you want to hear.

I never promised a peace that was safe. I never promised a peace that would fit into your terms. A peace that would keep the status quo. I never promised a peace that will only benefit a few. I never promised a peace that would be free of conflict. The peace I bring will level the playing field. The rich will be made lowly and the poor will be lifted up. The powerful will be brought down and the meek will be given places of honor.

I never promised a peace of the status quo.

I am stirring the pot. I am calling you to open your eyes. I am calling you to make choices as my disciples that will go against what you hold as the norm. You may have to stand up to the powers that be. You may have to break your family ties. You may have to go beyond your comfort zone. You are called to be my disciple and that transcends all allegiances.

Jesus calls us to a radical transformation in this passage. Jesus is calling us to be engaged in this world and to be alert to what is going on in this world, not just what we want to see or hear. Jesus wants us to know that divisions are provoked by the “fiery” intrusions of God’s redemptive power.

Jesus is stirring the pot.

As we read our scripture today, we are confronted with the new age of God’s kingdom and the choice that are required of us as disciples. We say we want the fire to come and cleanse. However, we want to control the burning of this fire. We stand ready with our water hoses, waiting for it to get out of control, daring it to burn too much, daring it to strip away too many things that we are not ready to let go of yet.

The peace that is promised at Jesus' birth and the peace that Jesus talks about here is not a peace that means an absence of conflict. The peace that Jesus brings is oneness in our relationship with God. It requires a lot of soul-searching on our part to achieve this peace. It requires that we look beyond the surface, to look beyond what we want to see, and acknowledge the darkness that resides in our souls. And this is not an easy process and not one that we readily want to happen.

In our scriptures today, Jesus is answering our shouts to bring the purifying fire into our lives and into our world. Jesus is bringing this cleansing fire on God's terms, not ours. Jesus wants to strip away all that is keeping us from allowing new growth to take root in our lives. Jesus wants to strip away everything that prevents the promise of new life from germinating in our hearts. The fire that Jesus brings is filled with violence. The fire that Jesus brings is filled with Chaos. The fire that Jesus brings will bring division. And we want to suppress that fire. We want to control it. And Jesus says no.

The only way to overcome and destroy all that separates us from God is by means of fire and baptism. It is a process of pain. It is a process of division. It is a process of confronting the closed spots of our soul.

But when that heat of the fire touches those closed spots, seeds spring forth. When the fire beckons our souls, new life springs forth.

As we read our scripture today, we are asked questions that bring division, that spark the fire, that begin the soul-searching process to the peace in our relationship with God. We are asked "Will you wait with your water hose and douse the fire that will clean and purify you? Or will you embrace the Chaos that it brings? Will you put out the fire only for your protection or will you let the seeds of new life that spring forth from the fire to germinate in our lives? Will you celebrate the new growth that follows this fire that Jesus has brought into our lives? Jesus came into our world. He baptized us by fire to cleanse us, to burn away the dead. And to remind us of the promise of God's kingdom.

We live in the present time and we are surrounded by the signs of God's kingdom and the signs of new growth.

Jesus is stirring the pot. Jesus is calling us to stir the pot. Jesus is calling us to begin the process of soul searching that will give us the strength and the energy to be God's people in the world today, in this present time.

We are called to embrace the fiery intrusions of God's kingdom in our lives and in our world. We are called to share these fiery intrusions of God's kingdom with others by speaking out against injustice, by speaking out that all of our brothers and sisters in faith are not treated the same, by speaking and daring to create divisions in our world that will start the soul searching process of healing and peace for all of God's children.

Stir the pot. There is life after the fire. Burn away the death. Invigorate new life. Now in this present time.

This is our opportunity to be exposed to the fire that promises to cleanse our lives and to purify our souls. This is our opportunity to be invigorated by new life and new growth. This is our opportunity as people of faith to embrace the chaos of divisions and decisions and celebrate that God is making something new, that God is working on a new creation.

May that fire that cleanse and purifies fill our world and our hearts and people of faith to invigorate new life. Amen.