

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 15)
St. Luke 12:49-53

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Jesus said, "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." Three are divided against two in one house, father against son, mother against daughter, in-law against in-law. And all of this because of Jesus.

Jesus is the reason or cause for the division. Some in a house will believe in and confess Jesus to be the Savior of the world; others will not. And while those in the household may say that they love each other—and that's not always a given—internally, they are most certainly divided with hostility. It's not just father against son, etc., but vehemently so. In some cases, this division even results in abandonment, disowning, and divorce.

I can think of no greater example of this than related to the work that is being done in Germany among Iranian immigrants by LCMS missionaries with the SELK. There is much rejoicing in the churches there as Iranian Muslims are converting to Christianity and being baptized in numbers. However, not everyone from their households are converting, sowing deep divisions in their families. There is even risk to their very lives for converting; I'm sure you've heard the term "honor killing" before. Still, they give all of that up and risk their lives for the treasure that does not fail, where no thief approaches, and no moth destroys (cf. Luke 12:33)

More common, however, are the divisions that can occur in families where believing parents who did their best to raise believing children suffer heartbreak as those children abandon the faith. Or there are children of unbelieving parents who come to faith and bear the grief of knowing their parents are still children of the devil. More common yet, I would suggest, are those times when a believer marries an unbeliever. The temptation in these cases is either to abandon the familial relationships or downplay the division in order to create some semblance of peace, which is really no peace at all if it denies and downplays the Savior.

Dear hearers, this division runs deeper than these kinds of households, too. St. Paul wrote of factions and divisions within the household of God; the word he used, in fact, can also be translated and understood as heresies. (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:18-19) These divisions manifest themselves as congregations and even entire church bodies (a.k.a., synods) fight to remain faithful to the Word of God, so those who wish to compromise with the world will be divided from those who stand firm on the doctrine of God's Word. And just like among families, those who wish to compromise do so in order to create some semblance of peace which is really no peace at all if it denies and downplays the Savior.

Then, there are the divisions from outside of the church. Those who believe will always be divided from those who don't. Do you have any atheist friends? Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or Mormon friends? Sure, you call them friends, but there is division there, real division. These all find some sort of unity under the some doctrine which teaches that what you do matters most, while you confess that nothing you do can merit salvation, and there may be other points on which they agree...all against you! There is division on earth between the believers and unbelievers.

This division is exemplified in Scripture in the account of Noah and his family compared to the rest of the world. They were divided from the rest of the world and spared the wrath of the flood in the ark because he trusted God's Word. (cf. Genesis 6-9) This division is exemplified in Scripture in the account of the two thieves on the cross, where one continued to mock Jesus despite being under the same condemnation, while the other, in faith, made a plea for his own salvation. (cf. Luke 23:39-43) There is division on earth between believers and unbelievers.

That should be received as good news, but it doesn't work that way with this fallen flesh. Instead, what happens is sin compounding sin. Instead of being cause for great concern and care, these divisions breed contempt and hatred. After all, it's easier for this fallen flesh to hate those from whom you are divided, especially if they make the first move. For instance, how did you feel about Muslims following the attacks of September 11? How about of atheists after the Last Supper mockery that was part of the Paris Olympics opening ceremonies? How does that compare to the desire of your Father in heaven, that all people be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth? (cf. 1 Timothy 2:4)

It is certainly easy to say that you love all people as individuals for whom Christ died. Actually putting that into action, even sincerely believing it...that's another matter altogether. It is said that familiarity breeds contempt; that's certainly true in the house guests and fish sense, if you catch my meaning. Division also breeds contempt. It is so easy to feel a sense of hatred for that which is different from you. Nevertheless, the truth remains that they are someone for whom Christ was incarnate, born, suffered, died, and rose again, just as much as He has done for you.

Jesus said, "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." So long as there is a this side of eternity, where sin persists, so will divisions. Nevertheless, while Jesus did not come to bring peace on this earth for all time, He did come to bring peace:

- "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased! (Luke 2:14)
- Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1)

Because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, there is peace with God, a peace unlike the world could give (cf. John 14:27), a peace that passes all human understanding. (cf. Philippians 4:7) And this peace is yours because you have been given faith, by which God is pleased with you, as it is written, "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." (Hebrews 11:6) It is this peace for which those Iranian immigrants are willing to give up and risk everything, even divisions within their families. It is this peace for which Paul was willing to consider everything of his past, his own pedigree, as rubbish. (cf. Philippians 3:4-11) What could be reason enough to risk division on earth? Nothing but peace with God that comes through the propitiatory blood of His Son, Jesus Christ!

Peace with God brings division on earth. I'm not just talking about the division that Jesus mentioned in today's reading, and those similar to that. There's another kind of separation that comes from being at peace with God:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. (Matthew 25:31-33)

At the final judgment, that division which Jesus spoke of in today's text and exists on earth will be finalized as Jesus separates people like sheep from goats. The sheep will be ushered into the Kingdom of Heaven, while the goats will be banished to the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (cf. Matthew 25:34, 41) The sheep will enjoy true everlasting unity, being one with each other in Christ, at whose feast of victory they will eternally dine.

You see, dear Baptized, peace with God results in division from the second death. John wrote, Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:14-15)

I said before that Jesus is the reason or cause for division on earth. In reality, division on earth is sowed because in Christ you have been divided from death. Yet, you still live in the flesh in this fallen creation, and your Old Nature is always at work to convince you that this division from death is too much to bear,

and that you would be better off trying to be peaceful with those who are united with death. Your Old Nature is always at work to make sin and death attractive, so that you would ultimately be reunited with death, dividing you, once again, from eternal life.

But, that's the division over which to rejoice. You have been redeemed, purchased, won back from death to life. Your names are written in the Lamb's book of life, inscribed on those holy pages in His own blood, shed for you on the cross as payment for your sin and satisfaction for the death that you deserve. And if you are redeemed, then you are divided from that death, from the lake of fire, and granted entrance in to the holy city, New Jerusalem:

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:22-27)

If your name is written in the Lamb's book of life, then you will be granted entrance into the city with the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb at its center. Your name is written in this book because you are a sheep on the right hand of the Son of Man. You are a sheep because you believe and confess Jesus to be the Savior. You believe that Jesus is the Savior because you have been given faith to believe it from the mouth of God. You have been given faith to believe it from the mouth of God at the font, wherein you were claimed by water and the Word as a child of God and heir with Christ of the heavenly city, and strengthened at the altar, whereat you received your Savior's body and blood as bread and wine.

It has all been done for you, and so you are a sheep, divided from the goats, to be ushered into the eternal paradise of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. You have been divided from death to life, eternal life. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." (John 5:24) As St. Paul wrote, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23) That's the division that is good news, and it is yours, life is yours, because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.