

Burning Down For Building Up **June 9, 2013**

Scripture: Luke 12:49-56

[Jesus said:] "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on, five in one household will be 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 her daughter-in-law
and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

Sermon Outline: Burning Down For Building Up

1. Holy Spirit as fire: wind: Smoke

Baptism in water =Rebirth: just as the gestation of our first birth took place in water, so the water of Baptism signifies our birth into the divine life is given to us in the Holy Spirit. The water represents the purification. Re-creation.

Instead as Spirit= Fire- symbolizes the transforming energy of the Holy Spirit's actions. That which has been created will be changed. Not re-made but transformed. No do-overs. We stand and are judged. We come to discover the fire comes not in the form of all consuming judgment but instead in the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit.

2. It is important to not try to explain away scripture that we don't like. Scripture that challenges us. But it is important to try to understand the background of scripture. It is important to try to see the big picture. And so, when it comes to understanding the list of division Jesus describes, it is relevant to know that Jesus Christ, in all likelihood, had a dysfunctional relationship with his family. We know Jesus did not have the support of his four brothers (we don't know for sure how many sisters Jesus had, nor do we know if they supported Jesus).

Here is one of the examples of the tension between Jesus and his family:

Jesus was traveling from one town to another, teaching people about the gospel, and a large crowd was gathering as people followed Him. "When His family heard about this, they went to take charge of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind' (Mark 3:21)."

Jesus' mother and brothers came to see Him, but they were not able to get near because of the crowd. Joseph is not mentioned, though he probably would have accompanied his wife and other sons if he had been able to. It is believed that Joseph had likely died by this time. When told that His family members wanted to talk with Him, Jesus responded, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice (Luke 8:19-21)." And then there's Jesus' notorious statement recorded in Luke chapter 12: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

After this incident, Jesus' younger siblings disappear from the gospels. Only his mother sticks by Him. And Mary is there through the worst of it. She is there when they crucified our Lord... her oldest boy.

Loyal to the end, Mary was at the feet of Jesus when He was crucified. With her at the time was Jesus' close friend. As the oldest son, Jesus' responsibility would have been to care for his elderly mother, especially if she were a widow. She would apparently outlive Him, so as one of His last earthly acts, Jesus appointed His friend to take care of Mary. Jesus' choice to convey His mother's welfare to a non-relative again indicates Jesus' broken relationship with his brothers. Where were they? At least one of them should have stepped up to the plate to take care of their mother, and their absence speaks volumes.

So for Jesus, the description of division is very personal. It is an expression of his feelings. It is a description of what Jesus knew in his life.

And the truth is, sometimes our beliefs do prove to be divisive. Things haven't changed all that much in some ways. People who really believe in and follow Jesus' teachings must prepare for the opposition they will face, sometimes even from their own families. This was true for the first followers and it is true for us today.

Another truth is that sometimes whether we choose it for ourselves or not, our lives, our families, our relationships, become divided. I know for a number of folks in our church, this has been a year of division, a year of burning. It is remarkably painful to watch someone's life, someone's family; someone's relationships burn down. But there are some fires, some conflagrations that burn too hot to be controlled or extinguished. There are times when the most we hope for is to be able to contain the inferno of our lives so it won't burn other people. And when it all over, and we find ourselves standing in the ashes of our expectations, it is so hard to know where and how to begin putting it back together.

We would never choose these fires for ourselves. Unlike my pre-adolescent self, we don't go looking to start these fires in our lives. Often they come unexpectedly, and so initially, we just

try to put the fires out. Stop, Drop, and Roll! Roll like your life depended upon it! ...but then the world stops spinning and the hard work begins.

I know of no words that will alleviate the pain of a life that has known fire. No words that will repair the brokenness of loss. Lost marriage, lost relationship, lost spouse, lost home, lost health, lost hope... Sometimes it feels like it is too much Pain. Pain is ironic. We try very hard to avoid pain; we treat it like it is the enemy. But pain is our friend. It keeps us from being damaged. If we didn't feel pain, we might find we hurt ourselves much more easily. Pain reminds us to be careful, to protect ourselves. It too bad that pain has to hurt so much.

But given time, even our pain will pass. New life is nurtured by old life. Our fires become fertilizer for new growth, new possibility. Where there was once a field, God may be growing a forest. So be patient with yourself... new growth takes time and attention. Burns leave us feeling tender; our new life is fragile and soft. So be good to yourself... and be good to each other. Because though I don't have words that will take away your pain, I will walk by your side and hold your hand, and maybe together we can begin to discover the new life that exists below the ashes.

We have to choose the causes for which to fight and the commitments that are worth holding. Our faith, our church, our community. Together we have to work for the kingdom of God. We have to move like fire... like the Holy Spirit is blowing at our backs. And I believe on that glorious day, when thy Kingdom comes and Thy Will is done, we will all be singing God's praises like angels. This is the goof news. Selah.