

To understand our Gospel reading we must start at the beginning of Luke when Jesus tells us that he comes to guide us into peace.¹ This is a sign that we are uniters through Christ. Still, before there is peace there is often war. Think back to our world wars: there was a great deal of blood shed before there could be any resolution. In the same way, sin is a type of war on our souls, it can leave us pained in ways we never could have imagined. So today, Jesus tells us how we are going to be saved from such pain. Sadly, saving is a difficult process. Being saved from our sins separates us from things, and even people that we love.

Being saved from our sins creates division. Onlookers believe that we are being self-important and even haughty.

However, with his words, Jesus is pointing us toward the new Christ-like ways. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells us the type of hard truth² that can truly save our lives, and not just our life today, but our life forever.

He wants us to know that we are going to have to be strong and faithful in our belief in him. It is one of those times when Jesus tells us that our choice is not easy. The Ancient Near Eastern World was a place of abject immorality. If I listed some of the things that were happening in the culture you would be on your phones texting Fr. Roman and pleading for him to stop. Katie would have to censor my words. Laura, the senior warden, would have conversations with me after worship. It would be chaos.

This is what Jesus was standing against: he was saying that his way would mean following a path of morality that was not always evident in their secular lives.

In the same way that when preparing for battle soldiers, airmen, sailors, and marines must go through rigorous training camps, overcoming obstacles away from their family. Jesus is saying that to prepare our hearts to be freed from sin, we must separate ourselves and prepare our hearts. We have to know that our path is different from others.

Looking at the wording in Luke, Jesus says, "I've come to disrupt and confront!" Confronting our sins and disrupting the culture, that does not sound too terrible. This wording from Jesus hints at a bad board meeting where the leader was bit off. Perhaps a neighbor that is too loud.

The greek word here actually means to be torn apart.³ I am left to wonder what it would be like to be torn apart for our love of Christ? I imagine it means to completely change and transform in uncomfortable ways.

This is why Jesus uses the image of fire in Luke's Gospel. Fire is truly a destructive source, it burns and destroys. The fire will be lit up and transform all of us into a new creation and is not a tame creature: it will be a challenge.⁴ Jesus' fire involves his actual death. Those he is speaking to will first go through grief, then isolation, ostracization, and many of the martyrdom, being literally torn apart for Christ all so someday we have the opportunity to encounter Christ.

Division is oftentimes difficult, and still it makes the world a place where more people can understand their own opinions. As much as I abhor the current division in the world, I am

¹ Johnson, D. (2019). Disrupting the Peace. <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2305-disturbing-the-peace>

² Saler, R.C. (2013). Sunday, August 18, 2013: Luke 12:49-56
<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-07/sunday-august-18-2013>

³ Edwards, J.R. (2015). The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke. Nottingham: Apollos.

⁴ Neal, J.M. (2022). Proper 15C.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-20-3/commentary-on-luke-12-49-56-5>

glad people are taking a stand, perhaps just not about right things.⁵ They take a stand for politics and forget about Jesus.

Being wishy-washy on The Lord is what Luke's Gospel mentions in this reading. Specifically, Jesus warns people against not identifying yourself to Christ. It is why there were people mourning martyrs after Jesus died. Without conviction we are without God, standing truly alone.

I am going to clarify that I do not make a statement about who is being saved - that is God's work alone - merely that something concrete is missing if we are unwilling to stand for our faith.

As one theologian noted,

"Behind these words in Luke is the emerging vision of martyrdom in Christian communities, as Luke's own later narrative of Stephen's stoning would attest. We have no reason to think that Jesus is blessing this reality; he is only naming it."⁶

The path of division separates us from a secular world that cares more about instant gratification. As Christian, our gratification is eternal, which makes it hard to understand and explain. There is a peace in our heart and not in our mind.

Now, let's imagine we take a stand for our Christian faith. This might mean doing things we already do such as praying before a meal. Out loud. In a room of non-believers. The latter is something even I find uncomfortable.

Or even: inviting our neighbors to church because church is our happy place. This will inevitably lead to looks and confusion. What we have to do is make such changes while remaining grace-filled.

If someone chooses not to pray with us, do not throw your prayer book at them, that is bad form, rather pray for their needs later. If someone declines an invitation to church we can pray for their hearts to be open. I invite you to continue thinking of the same.

Being a Christian is a paradox, that means two opposites at the same time: we must both stand for our faith, divided from others while loving them and inviting them.⁷ This is more than challenging because it means we must at all times focus our hearts and souls on God and not become self righteous in our lives. We are divided from others to better understand our relationship with God and united in Christ.

Difficult truths mean true growth.⁸ In Luke's Gospel Jesus is saying that in order to save ourselves we must change our ways.

The saving grace is that we have support from each other rather than the loneliness that many Christians faced when Jesus spoke these words. Rather than the deep division that many people still face today across the world when they profess a life in Christ, in places where Christianity is illegal. We are called as Christians to pray for those in such a situation and at the same time find ways of standing for our faith.

As noted, another portion of our life is that Jesus can help us be a uniter. There are times when we gather together despite our differences, and there are times when we divide. Small

⁵ Edwards, J.R. (2015). The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke. Nottingham: Apollos.

⁶ Saler, R.C. (2013). Sunday, August 18, 2013: Luke 12:49-56
<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-07/sunday-august-18-2013>

⁷ Edwards, J.R. (2015). The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke. Nottingham: Apollos.

⁸ Saler, R.C. (2013). Sunday, August 18, 2013: Luke 12:49-56
<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-07/sunday-august-18-2013>

issues of interpretation, those can be overcome, yet if someone asks us to deny Christ's saving power that is what we must stand for in our lives.⁹

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a theologian during WWII. He sought to defeat the evil and sin he saw through Hitler's reign. This ended in Bonhoeffer's eventual death. Yet still, he recognized the power and importance of standing for faith. "Nothing can be more cruel than the leniency which abandons others to their sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe reprimand which calls another Christian in one's community back from the path of sin."¹⁰

Our greatest friends and allies can give us honest and harsh criticism in order to make us better people. Our Christian brothers and sisters can do so even more so, they can give us feedback to make us more faithful in our lives. It is why being in a church divided from secular culture is key to our Christian formation.

In our Gospel text today, Jesus offers us great compassion. He tells us of being divided from the world and united in Christ. He foretells the work we will have to do in order to follow him. Each of you knows your hearts and lives, just as Jesus does. It is with this understanding we recognize what needs to be changed. Where we need to separate and where we need to unite.

As this service enters a time of more formal prayer, we are provided with moments to reflect on our own lives and actions. Jesus is calling us to know and learn God's word so as not to be separated from it. I hope and pray we are able to do so and embrace the fire and diction to which we are called as Christians.

⁹ Neal, J.M. (2022). Proper 15C.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-20-3/commentary-on-luke-12-49-56-5>

¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, D. *Life Together*.