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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 15C)

August 14, 2016

Text: Luke 12:49–56

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

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6.

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased” Luke 2:14.

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” Luke 19:28.

Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” John 14:27.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace. Don't we cherish the promise that through Jesus we have peace with God the Father, our fellow human beings, and ourselves? In Christ the Lord, our hearts and minds rest and are at peace. Thanks be to God!

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Prince of Division. Wherever His name and Word are invoked, division soon follows. Jesus is the most divisive, controversial figure in human history. His life and teaching have created more controversy, more debate than any other. In polite conversation, it's acceptable to talk about God or about the divine or about spiritual things. But as soon as you mention the name Jesus, things become much more specific, much more intense. Division arises.

The Jesus of the New Testament – and that's the key qualifier, the Jesus of Scripture rather than the Jesus of human opinion – is a problematic sort of person. He doesn't really leave you many options. Either one receives His teaching in faith or you begin denying it in one way or the other. The Lord Himself declares this to be the truth. Vs.

51, “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.”

On the one hand, the Biblical witness is absolutely clear, Jesus gives divine, eternal peace. On the other hand, the Lord declares that He did not come to bring peace on earth but rather increase its many divisions. So which is it? Peace or division? How are we to reconcile this apparent contraction in Jesus’ words and actions with the enormous amount of Biblical testimony that the Messiah would bring in a new age of peace?

Jesus actually tells us the cause of both peace and division; the source is the same. Look at vs. 49–50, “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!” The fiery baptism Jesus is speaking of is His own crucifixion on Good Friday. Jesus’ fiery cross is the source of both peace and division. The apostle Paul describes the preaching of the cross as “folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (I Corinthians 1:18). Folly or salvation. Division or peace. It’s the same event with the same Person but the results are different. Peace and division are simply inherent in who Jesus is.

We really shouldn’t be too surprised by this duality inherent in the Lord Jesus. Are we not accustomed to hearing from Scripture about God’s Law/ God’s Gospel, about salvation/condemnation, grace/damnation, mercy/wrath? God’s fiery work among people throughout Biblical history more often than not has this divisive character. The Passover brought salvation to some, death to others. The same was true of the Red Sea waters; they brought about a new birth for Israel into a free people, at the same time, they effected the decimation of Pharaoh’s mighty army. The promise of a Son born of a virgin in Isaiah 7 was a message of salvation to God’s faithful people but a word of judgment against unbelieving King Ahaz. The Last Day judgment will be a source of eternal joy for some; horrific sorrow for others.

This dual nature of Christ’s work is really part and parcel of who He is and what He does. And in today’s gospel text, the Lord Jesus expresses His eager, zealous desire for this fiery crucifixion to begin. The translators chose the word “distress” in the phrase from vs. 50, “and how great is my distress until it is accomplished.” The idea of the Greek word is one of being “totally focused or absolutely consumed by the intention to complete the given task.” Jesus is zealous and eager to hasten along the Father’s plan to bring a fiery work of salvation and judgment to the world. Nothing

can stop the Son of God from reaching His appointed goal. He's focused, obsessed, consumed with saving the world – saving you and me – through His death and resurrection. What I want you to see in our Lord's words here is that He isn't reserved or hesitant about the work He will accomplish on Good Friday and Easter. There's no sense of "I'll go if I have to." Jesus is all in, completely committed, zealously desiring to accomplish this greatest work of His Father's salvation in the world.

This fiery cross, which Jesus desires to already be kindled, will bring division. Vs. 52, "For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three..." Father against son, mother against daughter, in-law against in-law (vs. 53). And Jesus knows His death and resurrection are the cause of it all. He is the Prince of Division and at the same time, the Prince of Peace. We can't have one without the other.

The Lord Jesus does fulfill the Scriptural witness that the Messiah will usher in a new era of peace. The Lord wins peace for the world in His death and resurrection. He gives peace which surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:7). This peace comes through the forgiveness of sins given to all who are united to Him in baptismal and Eucharistic faith. For that is what the sacramental preaching of God's Word does, unites the believer to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Baptismal and Eucharistic participation in water, bread, and wine brings peace from the Prince of Peace. The very Prince of Peace who united heaven and earth together in His human and divine natures.

As a Christian congregation, we must never give into the temptation to downplay or mute the preaching of Christ and Him crucified. Much of contemporary Christianity has shoved Good Friday and Easter to the side for the occasional appearance. It's the same ol' same ol' story. Can't we just move on to something more practical? Money, family, addressing societal problems, etc. Something that'll make a real, tangible difference in my life? The division begins anew even within the Christian Church. Did not the Jeremiah the prophet say, "Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" (23:29).

In answer to the desire for something tangible and practical, I would say that there is nothing more practical than peace, peace with God, peace with man. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding. The source of all financial, emotional, spiritual, and relational peace is Jesus. But He gives His peace on His terms, in His ways, not ours. His peace comes through His fiery cross and empty tomb given to you and me through His Word and Sacraments. Cherish them, cling to them with a zeal that is

“totally focused or absolutely consumed by the intention to receive” the gifts that are promised by the Prince of Peace through His Word and Sacraments.

There is yet another division that comes from the cross of Christ. In Jesus, we are separated, divided, from the power and domination of sin, death and Satan. Sin no longer rules our lives. Death is no longer feared. They are destroyed in Christ’s death and resurrection. You are divided from them, separated unto eternal life, peace, and victory. The turmoil of this fallen world is quieted in Christ’s promise to redeem, save, and bless. In Christ alone, there is true peace and unity that passes all understanding. This is the great paradox of the Christian faith. Jesus’ cross brings peace and unity to believers while at the same time it brings turmoil and division to those who do not believe. We must never, ever try to relax or resolve that tension. The Lord will use the preaching of His cross as He sees fit. Our task is to be faithful in the preaching of Christ crucified and risen. And we are to be faithful in our day to day lives of taking up the cross of Christ and following Him.

The preaching of Christ crucified and resurrected may create conflict, take away temporal peace, and increase division. But it also implants true, heavenly peace in your hearts and separates you, divides you from sin, death and the devil. Our Lord Jesus is absolutely consumed, focused, obsessed with saving you and all His people. He is the Prince of Peace who brings joy to the earth and glory to the heavens, the Savior of the world who calms our troubled hearts; He is the peace promised and given unto eternal glory.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.