

August 17, 2025
Pentecost, Proper 15, Year C, Luke 12:49-56
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I speak to you this morning in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Good Morning.

In this morning's Gospel reading, we find Jesus angry, stressed, disappointed and speaks profoundly of division.

This is not an easy gospel to preach. This gospel is not for Sunday school or small group study. It is a reading that is difficult even for mature Christians, with Jesus's destructive fire, his stress, his anger and his disappointment.

We hear Jesus say "I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Here is his disappointment.

At this point in time, Jesus has turned his face towards Jerusalem.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you,
how often I have longed to gather your children together and you were not willing".

Jesus knows that soon he will be judged, condemned and crucified. Jesus is aware that his ministry on earth is coming to an end. A ministry that took years to discern and nurture. A discernment that began when he was still very young. Visiting rabbinic teachers as a young boy, studying the Torah, developing a rule of life centered around prayer and reflection. Eventually, arriving in the desert for forty days, his faith and his call only to be challenged by the forces of the Devil

The affirmation of his ministry comes at his own baptism as God proclaims:

"this is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased".

Later, Jesus publicly declares his sense of call as he reads from the prophet Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is on Me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of our God's vengeance, to comfort all who mourn".

Jesus says: "I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress am I under until it is completed!" This stems from Jesus's mission.

He is sent by God to purify, and to distinguish what is genuine from that which is worthless. Life according to the beatitudes will have its share of conflict. For those who hunger and thirst for justice, this world today is **not** a comfortable place. As Simeon prophesied to Mary, Jesus was destined to be a sign that is rejected.

Jesus says: “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled”. Here lies his disappointment.

Jesus knows that his life and his ministry will cause huge divisions, even in the most sacred communities of all-the family. He calls his mission “a fire”. Fire can destroy and leave its mark forever. Yet it can strengthen with its enormous energy.

Our mission calls us to pursue peace and justice, respect every person's dignity, and show compassion for those in need. This commitment, rooted in the gospel and affirmed by baptism, is not always remembered or universally accepted.

Jesus can bring division among us, for those who live the way, and for those who do not. It is easy to point out, in this gospel, that this division is not political and exists in families alone. In our text today, *Jesus* is the sole cause of division. It is Jesus and his message which causes this division and conflict. Two against three and three against two.

Sadly however, religious divisions are also seen within the church today, which is divided along racial, political, class and denominational lines. The notion that religion divides people is at home with our modern world. It is commonplace that paradigms divide us and cause conflicts, while it is politics that unites us under the sovereignty of the government. A country has to be unified to move forward, and political leaders prefer not to deal with disunity in their party or nation.

But inevitably, politics divide families as well: father against daughter, brother against sister-in law, sister against brother. How we live in families and households **is** political and how we treat one another in families **has** political consequences. On the face of it, this gospel reading of Jesus, as the sole divider, is in conflict with claims that it is actually the devil who is the great divider.

French philosopher and sociologist Jacques Ellul, in his book “*Living Faith and Anarchy and Christianity*” thought that division was the politics of the *devil*- the one that not only tries to divide us from the Creator and creation, but also brother from brother, sister from sister, and nation from nation. For him, the devil creates political divisions, such as nations, political parties, elections, and causes, whereby politics, as the realm of power, causes divisions and violence.

But in our text today, *Jesus* is the sole cause of division. Jesus calls his listeners hypocrites for reading the weather but ignoring the significance of the present time. He criticizes them for focusing on earthly matters like wealth and food, rather than what truly matters.

His rural audience, like most farmers, studied weather for their livelihood, but perhaps their priorities were misplaced.

If one could observe the direction of the wind firsthand, that same discernment should be applied to understanding the significance of the present moment.

Jesus calls us to a deeper awareness, urging us not to be content with reading the signs of weather for our immediate needs, but to discern the greater realities at play in our lives and in the world.

His criticism is not merely about misplaced priorities regarding wealth and food, but about a failure to perceive the true spiritual and moral demands of our time. Just as farmers rely on their ability to interpret the weather, so too should we learn to read the signs of God's activity and purpose in our midst.

This discernment calls for our attention, reflection, and the courage to respond to what truly matters.