

Luke 12:49-56

The present time. Some say it is a time when Jesus is going to appear momentarily to save us from this mess we've made of earth. Some say (and I'm among them) that these are just the birthing pains, that it will get much worse before the return of Jesus to earth. And others will say, "Who's Jesus?"

We may laugh at that, yet we may have a sinking feeling in the pit of our stomach when we hear that because we know the truth of it. Some people may have a burning need to tell the world about Jesus, and some people may just not care. But the truth is: Jesus is going to return. He will return in a way that is not humble, meek, and mild, but in a way that no one can mistake that he is Jesus Christ the King. So I want to talk a bit about theories of what it's going to be like before Jesus returns.

There are people who believe that this world couldn't get much worse than what it is and want Jesus to return so they don't have to live through anything worse than what we are going through right now. There are climate changes. Be it natural or caused by humans there is no denying the climate is changing. The world is experiencing draughts and dust bowls, now not just in third world countries, but here in America. There are major earthquakes, record breaking storms, flooding, and wildfires. Even the island of Hawaii, a tropical rainforest, is experiencing a wildfire, and back in December one of the Hawaiian Islands experienced a blizzard. Another part of the current trials is that we are experiencing a global pandemic, mutations are still surfacing, and we don't fully understand its health consequences. And it seems as though people's attitudes have shifted so that nothing is more important than their needs, ideals, greed. There have always been wars, but now there are more countries with nuclear war capabilities. So, yes, it would be a good time for Jesus to return to keep us from experiencing anything worse than what the world is going through.

Other people believe that Jesus won't return until everyone on earth is ready to accept Jesus for their savior, and the world changes for the good, making it a place where Jesus feels at home. Their thought is that God cannot live among sin so Jesus will not return until all the sin in the world is gone.

You know that's a great way to live. I'm serious. It's a great to live as though Jesus would fit right in your life and walk beside you. It would be great if everyone's home was that way. Even though the Bible tells us stories of Jesus fitting in at a rich man's banquet and at a well where he speaks to a "worldly" woman (something unheard of in his day), it is nice to have a place that shines with the love of Christ. I'm not talking about shining clean. I'm sure you've heard the saying that cleanliness is next to godliness? Believe it or not, that's not in the Bible! I'm saying a home that has so much love that people know they are welcome there even before they step through the threshold. And wouldn't it be wonderful if we had a world that shines the light of Christ? But we don't. And in my humble opinion it isn't going to happen until Christ returns.

That is why I believe we are in the midst of birthing pains. Awful, painful times. Feeling as though they are going to go on forever. Even though we know there will be an end. When it's actual childbirth contractions the end is usually overwhelming joy, at least according to my mom. My mom told me the joy of having a child makes you forget all about the pain you went through to have that child. And I can see Jesus' return being the same way. His presence will make all the pain disappear.

Yet, when we look at the Hebrew people being rescued by Moses, we don't see them immediately living in a land of milk and honey. We see them preparing for a journey, being followed by the Pharaoh's army until they reach the Red Sea. Think about being right up against the edge of that water, knowing you either have to be able to cross the water or be attacked by the army, and if you live you will go back to Egypt to live as a slave under worse conditions than when you left. Then suddenly, the water parts. The land which was just a body of water is now completely dry. You walk across. On dry land. As the last one of you reaches the other side, the first Egyptian soldier begins making his way across. And it is dry land, until he reaches about the middle, and then the water comes back, and the chariot wheels get stuck in the mud, and all the Egyptian soldiers are drowned. You are safely on the other shore.

Will the return of Jesus be like that? Possibly. We don't know. We don't have any idea of when he is coming, we just know Jesus will return.

And how odd we talk about the peace of Christ when we hear Jesus say in today's gospel reading that he did not come to bring peace, but division. That even families will be divided. However, there is only division when people choose not to have Jesus. There is only talk of judgement when Jesus is absent from the heart or rejected. Jesus says he brings fire and he wishes the fire were already kindled. The fire that Jesus brings is not the destructive fire nor is it the comfort of a hearth fire. The fire that he brings is the Holy Spirit and he had to go through his own time of trial for the fire of the Holy Spirit to come to us. And faith in Jesus has brought division in families.

Darren Carlsen in International Mission News tells about the Muslims who have converted to Christianity, many of them because they saw Jesus come to them in a dream. Those people had to leave their families, their lifetime beliefs, everything they had held dear in order to follow Jesus. And they did. Muslims who convert to Christianity face rejection by their families, they face being socially ostracized from their friends, and they face the loss of employment; in Muslim-majority countries their governments may well persecute, imprison, torture, and kill them according to an article written in 2021 by Daniel Pipes. (Pipes, D., 2021 The Perilous Path from Muslim to Christian, [nationalinterest.org](http://nationalinterest.org)). So, yes, there is division among families. Even some Christian families have a problem when one family member decides to go to another church or denomination from where they were raised, although that isn't as prevalent these days.

In this life we will face trials. We will have differences of opinions. We will have difficulty. Being a Christian isn't going to save us from any of that. And I'm not saying that we have a pie in the sky religion where we wait until we leave this earth to receive our heavenly rewards that makes this Christian life worth it all. What we have is something that can't be found anywhere else. As Christians we belong to a group of people whose purpose in life is to live out of our love of God to make life better for others. When you are a recipient of that love you know you are loved, not just by the followers of Christ but by God. As a part of that group we know that there is nothing better in this world. We know the peace of Christ. The peace of Christ is unlike anything else we know because it is not the peace that leaves you feeling content, it is the peace that no matter what happens you know you are loved. That nothing will keep you from the love of God through Christ Jesus.

All glory be to God.