

Luke 12:49-56

These seem to be very harsh words coming out of Jesus' mouth! "I came to cast fire on the earth and how I wish it was ablaze." "I came to bring division." "Why can't you interpret the present time?"

As much as I would like to relate the fire reference to Pentecost, I'm not sure that's where Jesus is going with this. Jesus is frustrated, he's at a point where he really wants humanity to turn to him, now, and it's not happening. Fire can be destructive, but fire can also be purifying... A friend of mine tells of going to Yellowstone national forest a year after the huge fire destroyed much of the park in 1988, and seeing the flowers that only blossom after a fire has cleared the land. Jesus is looking for new life in his followers.

Fire will remove impurities from silver, it has to be held in the hottest part of the flame, the refiner must watch it at all times, and knows it is finished when their reflection can be seen in the silver. Jesus wants humanity to be the reflection of the creator, the one in who's image we have been made.

And when we truly have become followers of Christ there will be divisions because we will live our lives differently than those who follow the culture of the world, or a religion that does not believe in Jesus. Lee Strobel, a Christian author, reports in his book *Seeing the Supernatural*, that many Muslims have seen a man dressed in white in their dreams. This happens especially in countries where Christianity is outlawed. Strobel tells the story of Noir, a mother of 8, a devout Muslim living in Cairo. She had a dream of walking along a lakeside with Jesus. She says she felt the love, grace, purity, and beauty of Jesus as he walked beside her. It was the first time she did not feel shame walking alongside a man. She asked Jesus why he appeared to her, a Muslim mother of 8. Jesus told her his friend would tell her tomorrow. She then realized there was a man walking with them. The next morning she went to the market and saw a man who looked exactly like the man she saw in her dreams. The man said he normally would not go to the market on a Friday because it was too crowded, but he felt God pulling him to go so he went. Noir walked up to the man and he asked her if she had a dream about Jesus the night before. When she said yes, he told her about the underground Christian church meeting in Cairo. There actually is an ad in the Cairo newspaper listing a phone number to call and they would tell the caller about the man in white they dreamt about last night.

Lee Strobel actually has a woman in his congregation in Texas who tells the story of feeling Jesus' love and grace in a dream. She had moved to Texas with her husband because of the oil market. He was away for the weekend when she dreamt about a man standing next to her in a pond, holding a book. She told her Christian neighbor about her dream and her neighbor invites her to attend Easter services with her the next day since her husband was out of town. At the church she saw the man who was in her dream. That man was the pastor of baptism of the church, and he baptized her. Unfortunately Strobel does not report how the family members of these women reacted, but I believe that they would not have been happy.

Jesus said he came to make divisions. When true believers live in a way that goes against the beliefs of their family it does cause division. Yet, I listened to a video recording made by a convert from Islam to Christianity named Aiysha who said it is not easy but at the end of the day it is God who gets her through it and her life is far better than it was without Jesus.

Nonetheless, Jesus' call to Christ followers today still has a divisive element to it. He still calls us to divide ourselves from those who urge us to morally stray. He calls us to consider following

his will more important than family loyalty above doing his will. He says we are not to believe or follow those who act as if peace and happiness lies in possessions. He says we are to be humble and not build ourselves up at the expense of others. The divisive part of Jesus' call may be quite specific and personally tailored to our life.

Yet we can't forget that Jesus promised to bring peace, in John 14:27 he said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." Jesus was speaking to his disciples who were expecting a messiah who would bring the peace that comes from not living under a foreign rule. Jesus was explaining to them that he was not bringing that kind of peace, but an inner peace that allows a person to know all is well within, even when the world around them seems to be falling apart.

As for when Jesus asks, "Why can't you interpret the current time?" he is referring to those around him who do not recognize him for who he is, that they do not realize they are in the presence of the kingdom of God. And the kingdom of God is so very different from the culture in which they live.

Even here, in America, where we claim to want a Christian society, we do not follow the ways of Jesus. Jesus extols the virtues of love, forgiveness, justice, and he does not care about earthly possessions. So many people on earth are convinced that the possessions they accrue define them as a person. I remember buying a plaque for one of my friends whose husband wanted everything... a new car, a boat, a jet ski, a swimming pool, a nice house... the plaque read, "He who dies with the most toys wins." We both laughed when I gave it to her because we both realize it isn't true... our possessions can't go with us when we die. And it is the irony of this truth that made the plaque funny for us. But to Jesus it is no laughing matter. He wants us to free ourselves of possessions that mean more to us than he does. He wants us to love people more than we love our possessions. Jesus wants us to stop living a life that separates us from God. Not only because of our possessions, but anything we do or say that does not glorify God.

I don't know about you, but I find it a very difficult thing to live life without finding myself holding onto possessions that mean something to me even though I am not using them and someone else could benefit from them. I sometimes find myself speaking ill of a NASCAR driver whom I don't even know because they have done something that has caused my chosen driver to lose race position. And I don't think I'm alone in judging other drivers who cut us off in traffic?

Thank God that we are forgiven. Thank God that we have a baptism where we identify with Jesus. Jesus' death on the cross is echoed in our baptism as we die to the sin of the world. In a perfect scenario that would mean that we no longer sin. But in our human world it means that we have the desire to change what we know we have done to separate us from God, and to ask for forgiveness. It means that we have Jesus to advocate for us. It means that we are loved to perfection. Will we find perfection in this life? We cannot be or become perfect in the sense that we do not have any sin, but we can strive for perfection in love. We are created in God's image. God sent Jesus into the world not to condemn the world but so that the world can be saved through Jesus.

All glory be to God.