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**SERMON – 10<sup>TH</sup> PENTECOST**  
**LUKE 12:49-53**  
**AUGUST 18, 2019**

Today we see another side of Jesus that some people do not like. Why? Because what Jesus says and wants done for each of us, and the church, will cause - and does cause - friction in the church among people and families.

Listen carefully to what Jesus is trying to tell us this day and try to keep an open mind.

Stories of Discipleship: A Judge's Story Focus Question: How has our choice to follow Jesus caused friction in our lives?

Another question would be: "Have we really made the choice to follow Jesus 100% His way and not ours?" If not, that may be some of the friction we have in our lives. Even following Jesus 100%, which is almost impossible, will not be a bed of roses with no problems or friction. Many people give their lives just because they are Christian. What would we do if asked the question, "Are you a Christian and believe in Jesus?" Would we tell a lie and say we are not? Or would we have enough faith to say "yes" and maybe be killed right there on the spot? How strong is our faith?

Jesus continues his teachings to the disciples as he prepares them for the end time. No easy task. Many times Jesus is cast as a gentle peacemaker, but in this reading, he describes himself as one who brings fire to the earth. Some scholars associate the fire with the oncoming of the Holy Spirit who came like tongues of fire. But others see it as a reference to the final judgment. He may be referring to the judgment, for a tree without good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. He yearns for the fire to be lit and kindled, so watch out ... there is Danger: We have flammable Christians.

Some churches have no fire only excuses. Visitors find the church cold, often with icicles on the lights. The warmth of fellowship is lacking. Except for official greeters or the pastor's greeting at the door after service, strangers would not be greeted. Among the members there is a spirit of apathy, indifference and control. It is next to impossible to enlist leaders. We are resisting change, as the members say "We have always done it this way." And with that slogan, many churches are getting smaller and dying.

The average church today is in dire need of warmth, zeal, energy and enthusiasm. The Word of fire is coming in Christ. Christians are to be flammable people, ignited and on fire with the Holy Spirit.

What is a flammable Christian?

- ◆ They are aflame with God. Fire is a Biblical symbol for God. He came to Moses in the burning bush. On Mount Carmel, God comes in fire consuming the sacrifices prepared by Elijah. Jesus came to baptize with Spirit and with fire. When the Spirit comes, people are on fire with God, full of energy, interest, zeal, enthusiasm and vitality.
- ◆ Can we let the fire of God go out? The fire of God is not necessarily an eternal flame. The fire can be put out by the water of worldliness, by smothering the fire by the cares of this life, and by letting it burn out for the lack of fuel and trying.
- ◆ Use the fire for good. Fire is used to light other fires. Fire is contagious. If a Christian is on fire with God, those who come in contact with them are also set on fire. Christians are spiritual arsonists who deliberately set others on fire with God, even as Jesus says so in the text "I have come to set fire to the earth."

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So go in peace, or go to pieces. We, or most of us, usually think of Jesus in terms of the Prince of Peace. Our text reminds us there is another side of Jesus and His effect. He can also cause trouble, controversy, disharmony, division and death. Jesus will have no cheap peace. Sometimes Jesus says, "Go in Peace", but other times people go to pieces in terms of disagreement and division. Jesus is telling us it is not His way to have peace at any price: Agreement with falsehood; compromise with evil. When Jesus enters as truth, love and goodness, people divide themselves pro and con. It is said that wherever Paul preached, there was a revival or a riot. With Jesus present, there is no neutral ground; you are either for or against Him. The division occurs even in the closest knit family; some for and some against Jesus.

How does Jesus cause these divisions? In three ways: He speaks the truth; he refuses to compromise principles; and he lives by love.

Jesus is depicted as a judge, ready to cast down fire. He is ready to hold people accountable and just because a person becomes a disciple of Jesus, a Christian, this does not mean a life without conflict or friction. Jesus confronts the religious powers of his day and invites, not forces, them into a new relationship with God. Will we choose to follow or not?

Here is an example of discipleship: Judith began her freshman year at college with deep curiosity and a thirst to learn. Her parents urged her to stay close to her Jewish roots and attend synagogue regularly. She laughed inside when she heard those words because their family rarely attended services or respected the Sabbath. Their words seem hollow. Why were her parents pretending to be religious?

Once Judith arrived at college, she chose not to attend Sabbath services at the synagogue, but visited every church and mosque in town. She had no idea what was happening during the worship service, but she became fascinated by the rituals and music. At night, she would search the web for the doctrine and faith practices of religious groups. Exploring faith became a hobby with her. At meals, she would enter religious dialogue with anyone who might be interested in such a conversation. Prayerfully, she discerned her own relationship with God.

On spring break, her parents were dismayed when Judith announced her decision to become a Christian. They took her to the rabbi for counseling. At one family meal, her grandma began to wail and her grandpa stomped out of the room. Her mother stroked Judith's hand and asked again, "Honey, one more time, why do you want to follow Jesus?"

Some families still split over religious beliefs while others choose not to discuss religion in their own homes. Jesus seems to realize he is bringing a crisis into people's lives. Each person makes choices about following Jesus. Faith cannot be passed from one generation to the next generation like an inheritance, but it can certainly be nurtured in the home. Children are not excluded from parents who do not believe. We must remember that the Holy Spirit uses people in a variety of settings, many different settings to share the good news of Jesus.

WE all should become Pollyanna's and accept all people, especially within the church, to have peace with each other. But in this Gospel reading, Jesus turns that hope upside down. Some churches have people who are not open to Jesus at work in their lives. They are oblivious to, or cannot and do not want to see the mission of Jesus and do not want to change from their ways.

In strange and unsettling words, Jesus revealed that his coming will often result in conflict. Because he demands a response, families may be split apart when some choose to follow Him while others refuse to do so. Jesus allows no middle ground. He demands loyalty and commitment, sometimes to the point of severing other relationships. Are we willing to risk our family's disapproval in order to follow the Lord? We have to make up our own mind. Amen.