



Pastor Ken's Sermon

**SERMON – 10TH PENTECOST
LUKE 12:49-53
AUGUST 14, 2022
“A GOOD SEPARATION”**

18th century French philosopher Voltaire once said, *“If God created us in his own image, we have more than reciprocated.”* Like just about anything a philosopher says, you may need a little head scratching time to unpack that statement. I happen to think it resonates pretty well with Martin Luther’s famous dictum that the human heart is an idol factory, cranking out the latest versions of who we want as our god almost round the clock.

Our lesson today from Luke finds our Lord addressing that tendency. Luther said, *“Jesus gets tired of our unbelief, so occasionally he speaks to us in the harshest of tones, sending Moses after us”* (a reference to the law that convicts us of our sins). Jesus is in a sour mood today – speaking in bluntly much like the prophet Jeremiah did in our first lesson. There can be little sugar coating of his words. In Luke 12:48 he says, *“from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded, and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”*

And you and I are those. And to us our Lord says – *“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled.”* Here is Moses and his fury over the sins of the people at Mount Sinai if ever you’ve seen it! Jesus is all set to chuck the tablets of the law right at his unbelieving followers. Yet, he relents, knowing the fire of which he speaks will not come from him but rather consume him - the baptism of which he speaks is his coming passion and death.

Jesus’ cross is the most important event in human history - upon it, God condemned human sin, placing it upon his Son, defeating death and the devil. If our Lord had only left it at that we might almost be at ease. We’ll let Jesus go to the cross for us – it ought to distress us but then again, we also rejoice in it, speak of *“blessed Calvary”*, sing hymns with titles like *“In the Cross of Christ I Glory”*, that sort of thing. Thomas a Kempis, the great 14th century monk and author of *“The Imitation of Christ”*, said however, *“many people love Jesus’ heavenly kingdom, but few welcome it’s demands here on earth.”*

Which may help us understand the second part of our Lord’s message today – that he did not come to bring peace on earth, but division. And it feeds one of the great challenges to the Christian faith today – the perception that our faith is rigid, unyielding, and that we place upon people spiritual straitjackets. Nothing is disliked more in our culture today than *“exclusivity”* and Jesus sounds awfully exclusive- declaring that allegiance to him will divide even the most intimate of human communities, the family.

Jesus words about people parting ways over him makes Christianity look like an enemy of social unity, cultural sensitivity, even authentic personhood. *“What do you mean the bible says...”* is a refrain we’ve all used at some point in our walk with the Lord. Voltaire was right – *“if God has created us in his image, we have more than reciprocated”*, making God in our own not infrequently. Jesus was even ‘righter’ – *“to whom much has been given, much is expected.”*

Jesus is calling his people- you and I to account – his words dripping with the urgency of the prophet Jeremiah who challenged the people of his day, asking *“which (of the prophets you listen to)*

has stood in the council of the Lord, to see or to hear his word.” Division ... division you say? Are we not a divided people, a divided nation, sadly even a divided church? Who are we listening to these days, and are they bringing us together? Are they preaching peace when there can be no peace without God’s truth and justice?

Have our “prophets” on the news channels, social media sites, college classrooms or bestseller lists *“stood in the council of the Lord, to see or to hear his word.”* And yet are they not just as “exclusive” in their claims as the church has ever been? Does not the “cancel culture” or “political purists” of the day demand adherence to their doctrines, lest *“you not be one of us”* – and along the way divide citizens, co-workers, and while we’re at it - families? Who are you listening to these days? Does their message square with Scripture – are its aims and aspirations something you can honestly say resonates with how Jesus taught, and more importantly, treated people?

And if you say no, and you are courageous enough to part with those who say otherwise, you will very likely find them parting ways with you. *“No, I tell, not peace, but division.”* Ah hah! And for those outside of the Christian faith, the “prophets” of the evolving cultural norms of our day, be they political, economic, sexual, it matters not – they’re dishonest if they claim they want unity and inclusion when in fact they seek only to divide and dominate. Let’s be honest about the criticism of passages like today’s and the charge that Christianity is restrictive – any community that doesn’t hold members accountable to specific beliefs and practices is no community at all.

Theologian Miroslav Volf of Yale University said this, *“ no boundaries mean... neither happiness nor pleasure, neither freedom nor justice could be identified”*, and I would add, enjoyed. Jesus did not come to bring us into a kingdom like that – a kingdom of uncertainty...ambiguity...compromise...a kingdom of misery. Yes, his are hard words today.

Yet, the Christianity passed to us from the Apostles is not hard. The necessity and sufficiency of the atoning work of Jesus on the cross, the assurance of forgiveness for all who call on the name of Jesus, the call to love neighbor as ourselves, the recognition of our createdness, we are who God created us to be, and the reliability and authority of His word, his revealed will, the Bible. This is our faith. Hold to these and you may have to separate yourself from others – that is true.

Being a Christian means being free – not constrained. But this freedom, Pastor Tim Keller of Redeemer Church in Manhattan says, *“is not the absence of restrictions but the discovery of the right ones, the liberating ones.”* Jesus did not come to smother anyone, of any culture. Christianity is the most “cross cultural” religion in the world. Jesus came to set you so free. In the most radical, wonderful way, it is in fact God in Christ who “restricted himself.”

In his incarnation, in his suffering and death, Jesus Christ adjusted to you, taking the form of a servant he submitted himself to your sinful nature and died to forgive you of it and lead you out of it. C.S. Lewis was once asked *“is it easy to love God?”* His wonderful reply...*“it is easy to those who do it.”* God created you in His image, in love. Being Christian is the happy task of reciprocating to that. AMEN