

August 14, 2022 Pentecost 10C

Luke 12:49-53

The Cost of Peace

*“Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.” Luke 12:51*

Sometimes I think we make things much harder on ourselves than we need to. I am reminded of the story about the teacher who was helping one of her kindergarten students put on his snow boots. He asked for help, and she could see why. Even with her pulling, and him pushing, the little boots still didn't want to go on. By the time they got the second boot on, she had worked up a sweat.

She almost cried when the little boy said, “Teacher, they're on the wrong feet.” She looked, and sure enough, they were.

It wasn't any easier pulling the boots off than it was putting them on. She managed to keep her cool as together they worked to get the boots back on, this time on the right feet.

He then announced, “These aren't my boots.”

She bit her tongue rather than get right in his face and scream, “Why didn't you say so?”

Once again, she struggled to help him pull the ill-fitting boots off his little feet. No sooner had they gotten the boots off when he said, “They're my brother's boots. My mom made me wear 'em.”

Now she didn't know if she should laugh or cry, but she mustered up what grace and courage she had left to wrestle the boots on his feet again.

Helping him into his coat, she asked, “Now, where are your mittens?”

He said, “I stuffed 'em in the toes of my boots.”

I bring this up today because of Jesus' words about peace and division. We tend to make this a whole lot harder than it needs to be and we make our divisions a whole lot more harmful than they need to be. Jesus said, *“Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.”*

Jesus was talking to a Jewish audience that had been Jewish all their lives, along with their ancestors going back 1400 years to the time of Abraham.

And when people left that Jewish faith to follow Jesus, it caused division—family members turning against family members.

It happened in Jesus' own family. Though Jesus' mother Mary would be with him at the cross, and his brothers would be back with the disciples by Pentecost, the Gospels tell us that there was a time when his family wanted to bring him home as they wondered if Jesus hadn't gone crazy (Mark 3). And he is well aware that this is just the beginning of the ways that the path he offers will divide many, even as a new community comes into being.

Six chapters further into Luke's Gospel, Peter will say, "Look, we have left our homes and followed you." And Jesus will respond, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life." Jesus wants those who follow him to understand not just the rewards of this new life, but also the cost they will pay. This is the price of true peace.

Yet the church has really compounded this idea of division and its consequences. According to a little bit of research I did on google, there are over 200 Christian denominations in the U.S. That means the church in the U.S. has divided over 200 times. Worldwide, the number appears to be about 40,000 different branches of Christianity. The church has divided about 40,000 times over differences.

Lutherans seem to excel at division. By my count there are 31 different groups in North America that identify as Lutheran. That's how many times we've divided. We knew when Lutherans first came to America, there would need to be 2 groups—one for the Germans and one for the Scandinavians. Everyone knew the two groups couldn't get along. As one of my 95 year old shut-ins in my first congregation in Princeton, MN explained it to me: "The German Lutherans built their church on the East side of the Rum River and the Scandinavians built their church on the west side of the Rum River. The German boys stayed on their side of the river and married German girls and the Scandinavian boys stayed on their side of the river and married Scandinavian girls, and everything worked fine until some @#\$% fool came along and built a bridge."

Divisions over Jesus, yes we have them. But we have made the cost of peace a lot more costly than it needs to be. We've made getting our way

more important than true unity. Or we have defined true unity as everyone doing things our way. That's why we have 200 Christian denominations, 31 of them calling themselves Lutheran. We've gone for a far inferior peace.

The word for peace in Hebrew is "shalom." Not just the absence of war, shalom means wholeness, well-being, and health, as well as what we think of as peace. All of those meanings are present in shalom. This is God's peace which passes our understanding. Shalom is a truer, deeper peace. That promise of God's peace was part of Jesus' life and message all along.

Jesus often sent those he healed on their way by saying, "Go in peace." Jesus makes them whole, healthy, peaceful, gives them well-being, and then sends them away in that deeper peace, called shalom. In his final word of peace in this Gospel, Jesus appears to his disciples after the crucifixion. It was the first time they saw Jesus after they had betrayed him and run in fear to avoid arrest. Jesus avoids any talk of all that has happened between them and says, "Peace be with you." Jesus, God's own Son, was a man of peace who brought shalom, God's peace, to broken hearts and lives. And yet, this Sunday he says that he came to bring division.

Jesus longs to bring a deeper health and wholeness to our world and the cost of that process will be division. The greater peace will come at the cost of lesser peace. The peace of God brings an end to the false peace and, as Jesus says, pits family members against each other.

This same Jesus says, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid"* (John 14:27).

And Paul writes about Jesus: *"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near"* (Eph. 2:14-17).

We have peace. We have unity. Jesus has brought that. It starts with our baptism. Living into the new life in Jesus which is promised in baptism can and will change your behavior and your attitude over time if you take it

seriously. Taking the promises made in baptism seriously should change our lives. Yet, this is in tension with a desire to avoid conflict and so to preserve a lesser peace. The cost of accepting these accommodations and compromises is that this prevents our breaking through to the deeper peace waiting for us. Shalom, God's true and lasting peace, calls us to stand against injustice. It means we make peace. We act in love for all people. We bring justice. Any time we preserve the peace at someone or some group's expense, we trade God's shalom for a poor imitation.

Yes, Jesus brings peace. Yes, we have division. But do you realize that when we get to heaven, there will be people from all 31 Lutheran denominations, all 200 Christian denominations in the U.S., all 40,000 Christian denominations around the world? The divisions are not going to matter then. And we let them matter way too much right now.

Listen to how Paul talks about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10: *"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf"* (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

We are one loaf—all of us who share the Lord's Supper are one, united, undivided in Christ.

We had a great picture of this last week in our Vacation Bible School. Over the course of the week we had 98 participants and 71 volunteers. We had every shade of white skin and brown skin. We had Lutherans and Baptists and Pentecostals. We add Anglo and African-American and Ethiopian and Liberians and several different Latin Americans. And we were all together. And we were one and it was beautiful!

So we have peace. We have unity. Let's not make this harder than it is. Let's just live in it. Amen.