

The Rev. Joel Petruschke  
Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
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Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, the words we just read, the words here in Luke attributed to Jesus, these words are not easy to swallow.

Yes, this morning's gospel passage is difficult to hear.

Jesus comes to bring fire to the earth.

Jesus comes to bring division among people.

Father will stand against son.

And son against father.

And mother will stand against daughter.

And daughter against mother.

These are hardly comforting words.

No, these are disconcerting words.

For we would expect Jesus to be the bringer of peace.

We would expect that Jesus would bring healing.

That reconciliation and goodwill would accompany the presence of Jesus.

Not conflict, not discord.

Not angst, not trouble.

PAUSE

But there may be some validity to these words.

For this notion of conflict and division is not without example in history.

Think about the time when Civil War fractured this country.

Think about when families were at odds within themselves over the issue of emancipation.

The gospel of freedom and equality for all people divided people, divided families, and resulted in terrible bloodshed for our nation.

Conflict and division ripped at the very fabric of our nation.

And this, THIS is not unlike that of which we hear in our gospel.

There are examples of this of very thing in history.

It has happened in our nation.

Our country has experienced it firsthand.

But I don't think it is not such that Jesus himself brings conflict and division.

It is not that Jesus himself decides in his divine mind to cause animosity and heartache in families and among people.

No, I don't think this is what the gospel writer Luke was getting at when he included these words of Jesus in his gospel narrative.

No, what I believe Luke was want to say here is that the gospel is divisive by its very nature.

Some people will cling to the truth of the gospel, while others will not.

Some people will hearken to the word of God, while others will turn away.

Some people will believe, and others will choose not to believe.

Like the Civil War that divided families, some were for the gospel of emancipation and others were not.

So, in that way, there is a definitely a sense of divisiveness that can be associated with the gospel and with Jesus Christ.

And this is what Luke would appear to be telling us in gospel passage today.

PAUSE

But over the years, I have struggled more and more in my personal beliefs to agree with Luke.

You see, I was taught back in my seminary days that it is SIN that divides people.

It is sin that sets people against other people.

It is sin that drives wedges between people.

Sin that cause disagreements, that causes discord, that causes conflict.

Sin is the culprit, and not the gospel!

And to the contrary, it is grace that works within the gospel of Jesus Christ to heal broken relationships.

Grace which works to bring together estranged parties.

Grace which works to mend disagreements.

PAUSE

Now, I am not saying that we all have to agree on a given issue.

I am not saying that we all have to be of the same mind.

We don't all have to be Liberals. We don't all have to be Conservatives.

We don't all have to be Republicans, nor do we all have to be Democrats.

We don't even all have to be moderates.

We can be of different opinions and still be in relationship.

PAUSE

I was reminded of this at Chautauqua a few weeks back.

As you probably all know, each year my family and I go to the Chautauqua Institute in New York state.

My wife and I go there specifically for our continue education time.

And each year we learn about some interesting topic, whether that topic or theme of the week is the West, or Pakistan, or the Future of History, or Ethics in America, or some other interesting topic.

This year the theme of the week was "The Vote and Democracy."

“The Vote and Democracy.”

And it was interesting to hear renowned speakers talk about the state of our democracy, especially with the two party system we have.

And one speaker noted just how broken our system has become at least in one very specific way, such each party now entertains the practice of supporting the opposition in the primary.

The thought is that if you support who you think is the weakest and most problem-ridden candidate in the opposing party and that person gets elected in the primary, then the candidate in your own party will have an easier time getting elected in the general election.

So, the persons of an opposing viewpoint will actually pump money into the opposition’s campaign.

But the speaker at Chautauqua warned about how dangerous a prospect that is, to raise up a problem-ridden candidate who then might even win the overall election.

But, just think about how warped our election process has become...

How divided we have become...

How irresponsible we have become...

Such that persons would support the opposition in the hopes of ultimately defeating them.

I share this so as to say, that truly is not the gospel per se that divides people, but it is still the power of sin that divides us.

PAUSE

And then throughout our week at Chautauqua, we listened to speakers discuss ways to heal our democracy.

And you know what the speakers kept coming back to?

It was this.

That we have to talk with our neighbors.

That we have to listen to other people.

That we have to converse with persons, especially persons who hold an opposing viewpoint, who don't think the same way we do.

More often than not, our mentality, the speakers at Chautauque were saying...

More often than not, our mentality is such that we come to hold a particular viewpoint and we think we are right.

And then we listen only to those talking heads who share our viewpoint, and so then become convinced all the more that we are right.

And we seldom, or rarely do we talk civilly with the other side.

And it is not that we listen so as to be swayed to other person's viewpoint.

And it is not that we need to convince the other person that we are right and they are wrong.

No, but we should talk with one another to understand more deeply our viewpoint and their viewpoint.

Talking with, and listening to, other people doesn't have to have an agenda, other than to understand each other better.

It is enough to converse with other people for this purpose alone—that we acknowledge the humanity of one another.

That those who don't share our opinion are not inhuman, that they are not demonic, that they are not evil.

If can at least get there, to acknowledge the humanity of one another, by conversing with other people, than we have already made a huge, a HUGE step.

We have already made a step toward healing, a step toward reconciliation.

And that, my friends, is God's grace at work in the world.

How well we understand each other, how well we appreciate the humanity of another, is the measure we should use to INTERPRET the world.

PAUSE

Now, Jesus tells us that we, as people, are good at predicting the weather.

We see clouds building and we know a rain storm is coming.

When there is a wind blowing in from the south, we know there is going to be scorching heat.

Doesn't all that sound familiar with our latest weather pattern?

So, we know how to INTERPRET the appearance of the earth and sky, says our Lord, but do we know how to INTERPRET the present time?

How good are we doing in understanding and appreciating the humanity of others?

We have to wonder about this, in light of the Ukrainian/Russian conflict.

In light of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

In light of the posturing going on around the island state of Taiwan.

Luke was want to say that such things presage the end-time judgment of the world.

That somehow then we are on the doorstep of the final judgment.

That our inhumanity toward others, our lack of understanding of each other, can be INTERPRETED as certain bad news.

And it is. But who knows, whether we are on the doorstep of the end-time? Who knows?

In the Bible, it says, that about that day and hour no one knows except the Father, not even the Son.

What we do know is that God in the person of Jesus Christ deeply desires to understand and to know us.

We do know that God appreciated the humanity of his creation, so much so that God himself became human in Christ Jesus.

And it is by Christ's cross that God is healing division and animosity.

That is the way we see the world, through the lens of the cross.

That is the way we interpret the world, through the cross.

Not by conflicts, not by war or the rumor of wars.

We will always have that.

But how are we allowing the example of Christ's cross to move us to try to understand each other, to appreciate the humanity of others—that is how we interpret the present time.

Grace, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, works to restore the human family to right relationship.

Grace works to bring about reconciliation.

Yes, the Gospel does bring the power of sin into sharper focus.

And so it would seem that the Gospel is the cause of division and conflict.

But really is it sin that is at work.

And, it is only, ONLY the example of the cross that can cure our sin-sick world of its division and conflict.

Only the cross, the example of God coming to understand us, to appreciate our humanity, and to die for us...

Only the cross can cure our world.

And only then by our taking up God's example of trying to understand and to appreciate the other's humanness can we find ultimate healing in this world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.