

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we hear the very disturbing words of Jesus saying that he does not come to bring peace but rather division. His words are disturbing because we don't like this Jesus, we would rather the kind, gentle, white bread Jesus that loves everybody...even though, deep down, we don't really want our Jesus to love *everybody*, just those we love. We want our Jesus to be agreeable with our assumed self-righteousness.

No...today we get the Jesus with an attitude. This is the Jesus that doesn't take any crap and tells it like it is...this is the side of Jesus I really like. I like this Jesus because we tend to surround ourselves with people who share common interests, ideas, religious beliefs, and political philosophies. As human beings, we're hard-wired to seek similarities in others because it makes us feel better about ourselves, makes us think we are being heard by others, makes us comfortable, safe and even self-righteous. If any of these opinions change in our hearts and or our minds and habits, then more than likely, our friends change too. Moreover, when these things change, some of our friends may feel wary or suspicious of our motives. Our faith can do that too...you all have heard it...oh they think they are so righteous! How many talk politics with those on the other side? You all know the other comments that go along with this. Yes, there is no doubt that there are relational costs in following Jesus, but this is not the intent of Jesus it is the "by-product" of following Jesus.

There are things that change socially when following Jesus, but is this the only separation and division being mentioned by Jesus today within our Gospel lesson? Up to this point in Luke's Gospel we have heard some of the most beautiful and comforting words of promise from Jesus, but today we hear a different kind of promise...today we hear a very harsh promise of division from Jesus when he says:

⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!

While I truly believe the division that I spoke of at the outset of this sermon references some of the division that Jesus is referring to, I do believe that the division Jesus refers to is not just a social type of division, or a human behavioral division, but rather a much deeper theological division or separation as well. With that said, I want to begin unpacking the Good News for us today by focusing our attention to these words of Jesus that may be somewhat unnoticed because of the shocking impact of division that Jesus is bringing up to us today. In our lesson we hear Jesus also say:

⁵⁰ I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!

This comment makes me look at this division or separation a little deeper or theologically. We hear that Jesus is stressing about the completion of his Baptism. This raises the question, how is Baptism completed? What is the completion of Baptism? We all have been Baptized...what does that in itself mean to each of us, let alone, how is it completed. We are all immersed into this tension but are *we* totally governed by our Baptism? What stress has our Baptism brought about? When I listen to the words of St. Paul, I wonder what stress can Jesus be referring to? Saint Paul writes to the Romans:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:3-5)

These are such great words of comfort and even more so when they are read at the start of a funeral. While we all know the comfort of these words of St. Paul, we know too that Baptism is not just plain water poured over us, because we know that the water poured over us is water enclosed in God's command and connected with God's Word that instructs each one of us to:

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (Matthew 28:19).

Are our lives governed by this command? Do *we* even think about it, let alone stress about it?

Looking at this then, we cannot point the finger at the world or the culture out there and say they have done this or they have done that, or that the values and integrity have sunk so low that I need to "separate" myself from those out there. Nor does our Baptism divide us from others in any way. These words of Jesus today are challenging us to examine the inconsistencies of not just our faith but in our lives lived as well. Do we...*NOT THEM out there*...do we get stuck prioritizing the insignificant while jeopardizing the things of greatest value and importance?¹ In other words, do we compare the grace given us through our Baptism with insignificant things seen and done in our world around us? Or, do we look toward the greater value of what Baptism really means and the grace given for each of us and strive to extend that grace to more and more people so that it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God, (2 Cor 4:15).

In Chapter eleven of Luke's Gospel just after Jesus teaches us all how to pray, we find him casting out a demon. And after Jesus finished telling the crowd about the behavior of the unclean spirit, we hear that a woman speaks up and says:

"Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!" ²⁸ But [Jesus] said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!" (Luke 11:27b-28)

"Blessed rather are those who *hear* the word of God and obey it!"

For me, this response from Jesus is the stress of completing our Baptism. Do we even consider sharing the grace and love we are given in Christ, with those who despise us, criticize us, or have a different world view than us? To know the fulness of Baptism is to know that it is not just a blessing for me or those who have been Baptized, it becomes a calling for me and all who are Baptized, as well as a blessing for others in that when we are Baptized, we are given a lighted candle representing the light of the faith that has just been given through the waters of Baptism. We then are called to let that light so shine before others that they may see our good works and glorify, *NOT ME*, rather, glorify our Father in heaven.²

¹ Keck, Leander, senior editor. *NIB, The New Interpreter's Bible, A Commentary in Twelve Volumes. Volume IX, The Gospel of Luke.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995. Luke 12:54-59, "Interpreting the Times and Settling Accounts." Reflections, page 269.

² *Lutheran Book of Worship.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1978. Order of Holy Baptism, page 121.

I have to guess that the stress of completing the type of Baptism that Jesus is speaking about in our Gospel today has to do with how we who are Baptized understand it, and separating our self-righteous notions from the true understanding of Baptism. We tend to make our Baptism and our faith about ourselves but when we look deeper into the true meaning of Baptism, may we then begin to see the fulness of Baptism and faith completely...and then see the real separation that Jesus is referring to.

To begin with, we ought to know that to be baptized in God's name is to be baptized not by human beings but by God himself. Although it is performed by human hands, it is nevertheless truly God's own act.³ And in this act may we then seek out what is the significance of such a baptism with water?

Our Baptism signifies that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.⁴ Here, within Luther's explanation of Baptism in the *Small Catechism*, we hear the true separation and the stress that Jesus is under...the stress being his very death that makes this separation of our old sinful person into the new person that lives before God...possible.

We all would know too that living before God means extending that same grace to more and more people so that it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God and bring us all to the completion of God's Kingdom here on earth. Jesus reminds us that those who hear are blessed. Yes, the Good News for us today is that we have been separated from that old sinful creature and through our Baptism the NEW person comes forth...but now what?

Because we seem to assume so many hateful enemies of faith...perhaps we like to think our faith separates us from the world? NO! This world right now is where our faith exists and where we are called to share God's love. Keep in mind that after Jesus heals the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, the Pharisees are greatly insulted and we hear then that Jesus heads out on a level place in the Gospel of Luke and says this:

²⁷ "But I say to you *who are listening*: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; ²⁸ bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³² "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁵ Instead, love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:27-33, 35-36)

³ Robert Kolb, Timothy J. Wengert, and Charles P. Arand, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000. *The Large Catechism*, Fourth Part: Baptism, par 10, page 457.

⁴ Ibid. Page 360, par 12, *Small Catechism*.

Here is more division and stress we too experience through faith and our understanding of God's grace, mercy, and love that we are called to share. Sharing God's grace, mercy, and love will separate us from those most dear to us, because it will go against cultural norms and interpretations, and everyone else may say we are so righteous or even crazy, or just illogical. Here in the preaching of Jesus Christ today and in his teaching to us today in the Gospel is the very essence of the kingdom.

Jesus is teaching us that God's grace and love are not just for me and those I CHOOSE. If God can love me, why then would God NOT love others...why would others not be deserving of God's love if I am? So, we separate ourselves from the narcissistic ways of the world and of our faith and live in the stress of letting the light of grace shine on others so that we and all who hear the Good News may increase our thanksgiving to the glory of God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen