

August 15 2010 Sermon

Luke 12:49-53 49 "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! 50 I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! 51 Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. 52 For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

Jesus makes some bold statements in our text this morning: "I came to cast fire on the earth." "You think I have come to give peace, but no, I have come to bring division." Although we all consider ourselves Christians, statements like this should alert us to the fact that we don't know it all; and that there is a lot more we need to learn and to remedy in our lives as Christians. We are not the great super Christians we think we are. We are not all that holy and righteous as we act as we look down our noses at others and judge them.

Jesus' word is like fire; it is a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. "Behold, the storm of the Lord! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn back." The Lord Jesus causes fear and trembling and division because His Word is "like fire and a hammer that shatters the rock." His law puts us all to death.

Yet we too often don't really believe this. We are too complacent. We allow sin in our lives and don't really take it seriously while at the same time judging others. We become self assured and secure thinking that God is love and won't really do anything to us. We have heard that our sins are forgiven, so we conclude that it doesn't really make any difference what we do or how we live. We become apathetic. We know we do some wrong things; we know that our attitudes and thoughts and secret desires are not right. We know that we are often angry, we judge others, we feel superior, we don't forgive, we don't help a neighbor in need because it is inconvenient for us. But, God won't mind a few little things, we assure ourselves. And at least we are a lot better than those people over there.

We're not even sure we believe that God would send anyone to hell. Today we not only allow sins into our thoughts and hearts, we have stopped teaching our children what is sin. We leave it up to the pastor to teach them the Ten Commandments, and even then he better not say anything if they do fall into willful sin. We sit back and allow our children to fill their minds with filth and their lives with muck. We close our eyes to what they do in their private time, behind closed doors in their rooms, or with their friends. We don't want to hear about it if they are using drugs or alcohol or living in promiscuity. But God is love so hopefully He won't mind.

But has God really said that? Does forgiveness mean that God just closes his eyes to our sin? He says has come to cast fire on the earth. His law puts us all to death. He does not spare even his own chosen people. Look what he has already done. God did not even spare the angels who disobeyed him, but rather, condemned them to eternal chains and gloomy darkness until the judgment

day. Sodom and Gomorrah were punished with eternal fire for sexual immorality, yet today some who claim to be Christians live in adultery and don't see a problem with it. Jesus saved a people out of Egypt, but afterward destroyed those who did not believe. He was displeased with them and overthrew them in the wilderness. Some of them were idolaters. Some engaged in sexual immorality and 23,000 fell in a single day. They put Christ to the test and were destroyed by serpents. They grumbled and complained to God and were destroyed by the destroyer. These things happened to them as an example and were written down as a warning for us.

So then, if the angels or God's chosen people who he brought out of Egypt were not exempt from God's wrath and punishment, what makes you think you will be?

We are baptized believers, you say. But Martin Luther says, "God will not count sin against us if only we keep striving against it. [but] To them who do not strive against it, God will not forgive their sins. For they do not live according to their baptism and covenant, and they hinder the work of God and of their baptism which has been begun." "Watch out," says Luther, "if you thus wickedly and wantonly sin and go on presuming on God's grace, the judgment will lay hold upon you." God's law divides the believers from the unbelievers; and there will be divisions in every family, in every household, and even in the church itself.

Jesus told the people to discern the signs of the times. What sign has God given us? He has given us the cross. Here on the cross, God poured the fire of his wrath on his own Son. Here on the cross, Jesus was smashed with the hammer of God's law. If God did not spare His own Son, how, then, can you possibly escape? ...

By the mercy of God in Christ! Jesus, at his baptism, stood in the place of sinners. Why did a holy and righteous man like Jesus have to be baptized? Because he was lowering himself to the level of you and me. He was identifying with sinners. He made himself sin and took his place in line with other sinners who came to the Jordan River to be baptized by John.

From that time on he was under the fiery wrath of God. From that day on every time he healed a sick man, forgave someone their sins, or raised a dead man, he was absorbing all our sickness, sins and death into himself. Into his own flesh he absorbed our sin and our death. Then he sacrificed his flesh on the cross and poured out his blood to fulfill the terms of the covenant. On the cross Jesus received a bloody baptism with the fire of God's wrath. If the cross is the sign of God's wrath, the cross is also the sign of God's forgiveness of your sins. For on the cross, Jesus, who was heavy laden with the load of your sins, paid for your sins; he atoned for them, he purchased forgiveness for you with his holy, precious blood.

So if today, you discover that you are that person who allows sin in your life or even just in your thoughts and attitudes, even though it's just a little one perhaps; if you are the one who has turned his back on God's forgiveness and by your sin have walked away from the grace of your Baptism. If you, like King David after believing the Lord, fell into sin committing adultery and murder, but now desire to know God's love, then know this: that your baptism is a never ending spring of forgiveness and cleansing. In your baptism you drank the life-giving water that springs up in you with God's grace. If you

are the one who has wantonly sinned, presuming that God wouldn't do anything about it, having turned from your Baptism, know that your Baptism is still effective. That forgiveness offered you then is still yours. Your Baptism is the sign that God still pours out his forgiveness on you, even though it may be 10, 20, or even 50 years later by confessing your sin and turning from it you can return to your Baptism. In Confession and Absolution you are brought back by the Holy Spirit into your baptismal covenant, and God's promise not to count your sins against you is renewed.

"For it has been said," says Luther, "that if anyone has fallen into sin, he should all the more remember his baptism, how God has here made a covenant with him to forgive all his sins, if only he will fight against them even until death. Baptism is indeed that great a thing, that if you turn again from sins and appeal to the covenant of baptism, your sins are forgiven."

Do you desire to turn away from sin and ungodliness but the lure and pleasure of sin is too strong for you? Then Holy Communion is where you will find renewal and strength to resist that temptation. If you are addicted to the pleasures of sin and feel as if you couldn't live without it, the Spirit of God works in Communion to renew your heart and cleans it, setting you free from that slavery to lust and idolatry.

The law of God is a destroying fire that accuses all people. But our Lord Jesus Christ turns God's anger away and quenches that fire.

In Communion you are joined to the cross of Jesus. On the cross the fires of God's wrath were poured out on Jesus to annihilate the record of your sin; but here in Communion you join Jesus on the cross and, the purifying fire of God's Spirit is poured out onto you to purify and cleanse your dirty heart and free you from the power of sin and death.

Amen.