

“Jesus, fire, division and peace.” Luke 12:49-56

“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!

Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. 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.”

He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, 'A shower is coming.' And so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat,' and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

Today we have one of these alarming speeches of Jesus, which really has the power to make us feel uncomfortable. Jesus speaks about things which overly sensitive people of the West can't handle. I hope that we can.

First, Jesus speaks about casting fire on the earth and having a baptism, which scares Him a lot. Then He speaks about something that doesn't sound like Jesus at all. Or at least it doesn't sound like friendly and relaxed buddy Jesus, the image that is so widespread even in our Lutheran church.

He speaks about bringing division. In families. Not peace, but division. What kind of loving God is this, who brings unrest and division even among the closest people! I can picture many saying that this is not what Jesus meant.

This is kind of popular these days to be smarter than the Scriptures, to know what Jesus would and wouldn't say and to argue that actually the Bible tells us something different than what is clearly written in it.

Let's look at what Jesus tells us about this fire and this baptism, and what He tells about peace and divisions.

“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!” What is Jesus talking about? About the Last Day. About the Judgement day.

About the day when holy and caring God the Creator will purify the whole creation from all the evil and corruption, from sin and death that enslave it, and will restore it in its wonderful goodness. Then everything will be very good again and His human creatures will rejoice in His holy presence in everlasting blessedness.

When we think about fire, it does two things. It burns or it purifies. It burns chaff and it purifies gold. Almost always when the holy God appears to His human creatures, the Bible describes this imagery of fire.

Moses says that “the LORD your God is a consuming fire.” (Deut. 4:24) At the Sinai God appeared as the pillar of fire. The same is true in many visions which were given to the prophets. Fire, light, presence of God’s holiness, and people run away in fear, or fall on the ground unable to endure God’s presence.

Ask me later and I’ll share my life-changing experience with the loving and holy God as consuming fire. The point is, that when Jesus speaks about casting fire on the earth, He speaks about His second coming in His divine glory and power.

Then every eye will see Him, then all the nations will be gathered before His throne, and those who love Him, will “inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Mat 25:34)

This will be the day when consuming purity of holy God’s loving presence will destroy all the evil. It is rather simple, for nothing sinful can endure in God’s presence.

It really is like bringing hay closer to fire. Whatever your intentions are, it will still burn. Except that this time it will be the fire of God’s holiness that will come closer to the hay of our sinful and corrupted world.

This is the day when all sinners would be destroyed. The same people whom our loving Creator has formed in their mothers’ wombs, for whom He has provided all the days of their lives, and whom He would love to see in His presence forever.

The Bible is clear, our loving God doesn’t want sinners to perish but to repent and to live. He desires it so much that He is ready for the greatest sacrifice – to give up His life, so that only He could save us.

Jesus speaks about this baptism that He needs to endure, and that makes Him so distressed. He speaks about His death on the cross. Remember, baptism means cleansing, washing, purification.

Jesus was the holy Son of God, there was nothing to be purified in Him, but He chose to take the sin of the whole world upon Himself and to bring it to the cross. This is where His baptism happened, this is where all our sins and guilt were destroyed, purified away, and Jesus came out on the other side holy and pure. Ready for the life eternal.

This is what Jesus did in His baptism on the cross. He did it for you. Now when He has taken your sins upon Himself, He invites everyone, each of you to join with Him in His purity and holiness. And He does it by means of your baptism.

This is how Paul the apostle put it: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we

have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Rom 6:3-5)

Jesus took your sins, He underwent the Judgment Day, the Last Day on behalf of you, He endure the purification of all the sin and evil and even death, and now He offers you forgiveness, purity and eternal life.

This is what Jesus’ baptism was like. And you know what our Baptisms are like. Gentle, warm water, and sweet and sure promises of God: “I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” I forgive you, I give you the Holy Spirit as a guaranty of your inheritance in God’s eternal Kingdom.

Receive it, it is for free, for Jesus paid the price. The price of His sufferings and death on the cross. Receive, rejoice, be grateful and live as a forgiven and blessed child of God. This is who you are.

For you there is no more fear of what is to come. No more fear about all your sinful thought and desires being exposed on the Last Day, only peace and joy, waiting for the promised blessed life with your Saviour Jesus Christ.

Now, peace or division, what is this? What does Jesus bring to us? This is our second topic. Jesus said: “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three.”

What does Jesus mean by this? Is He kidding? I’m afraid He is not. And actually most of you would know from your own experience that He is not kidding. What Jesus is taking about is about the first commandment.

Who is your God? Who do you love more than anything? Who do you fear to lose more than anything? Who do you trust more than anything? Is your God the Triune God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, or ...

Or are you yourself like god. Loving yourself more than anything, fearing the most to lose what you love the most, and trusting your own wisdom and choices more than listening to God’s holy and perfect will?

This is where the division comes in. To be a Christian, to be a child of God begins and ends with the first commandment. All the other commandments are simply explanations on the first commandment. They simple elaborate what it means to love God and to love our neighbour.

What does it mean practically? It is so simple. It means that Christians lead their lives, their whole lives looking for the will of God. If you love someone, what will you do? Be it a spouse, or a child. You will try to make them happy.

If you love God the Father and your Saviour Jesus Christ, if you love Him more than anything, then you will lead your life in a way that pleases Him, the way He expects you. You will try to follow His guidelines in everything you do.

The Bible is very clear about how to love God. We don't need to invent anything. It is said again and again that to love God is to keep His Commandments. Yes, it is that simple. If you want to love God you need to learn, you need to understand His commandments and then to live accordingly.

This is how we love our God. It is so simple. And it is so hard. It is so simple, for Jesus' commandments, the Ten Commandments are simple, and beautiful, and wise, and they are a blessing for us and for all people in our life if only we keep them.

And it is so hard, for many actually don't want to love God. They may want to consider themselves Christians, if this is something good in their eyes, but they don't want to love God, not if it means to listen to Him and to keep His Commandments.

Young Christians cohabitating with unbelievers reply to loving Christian parents: "This is my life." Christian families spending their holy days having fun together with friends: "This is our holiday."

Christians embracing rotten lifestyle and "values" of our society explain it: "That's life, we live in different times." Disobedience is called initiative. Killing the unborn is called choice. Sexual promiscuity is called freedom. Greed is called competitiveness. Lies are called different perspective. Coveting is called motivation.

I am not talking only about the world. I am talking about people who call themselves Christians. Who is their god in doing all of this? Themselves. They love and trust themselves more than anything.

This is where divisions come in. When Jesus rescues us from under the power of Satan and brings us into His Kingdom, into His Church, He expects that we'll love Him and trust Him after all that He has done, does and has prepared for us. That we will fear to lose Him the most.

The Bible is clear that there are only two groups of people, those who love God, and do it by keeping His commandments, and those who hate God, by ignoring God's commandments and doing whatever they want.

This is the line of division. Either Jesus Christ is your God, or you yourself. If Jesus, then you will lead your life according to His will, and will try to share God's wisdom with others as well.

If you are like god yourself, then anything that Jesus expects from you as your response to His love, will upset you, for you want to live your life the way you want and no one is going to tell you what to do.

Sad and heart breaking thing is that this line of division goes even through the closest relationships. When parent want to love God and children don't. When children want to love God, and parents don't.

When one spouse wants to love God and other doesn't. Then there is this division. Deep, deep division which goes into the heart – who is your God, Jesus Christ, or yourself.

Many of us have experienced this kind of division. It hurts. When we see our loved ones turning against God, heading into destruction, and rejecting any attempts to bring them back to Jesus. It hurts. This is the kind of division Jesus was talking about.

But it is also true that Jesus brings peace. He brings peace to those whom He loves and who love Him, to His brothers and sisters. To you. The angels announced after Jesus birth: "Peace on the earth among those with whom God is pleased!"

On the last night Jesus said: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you." (John 14:27) It is a miracle and a mystery, this peace that Jesus gives us.

Many of you have experienced it. It is not external peace when all is good and well according to our desires, it is deep, joyful, blessed peace that surpasses our understanding, which dwells with us even when there is no peace around us, even when there are divisions among the closest, when we are right in the middle on this life's turmoils.

This peace comes from God's presence with us. It is one of the most wonderful blessings that God's children receive here in this life. We can know our Lord and Saviour. We daily learn how much He loves us as He speaks to us in His Word and feeds us with His Sacrament.

We can have good conscience knowing that He has taken all our sins and guilt and shame away, and has made us holy people of God. And we can have good conscience knowing how to respond to God's love.

If we love Him, we keep His commandments. What a blessed life it is for those who love God. Daily receiving God's grace and forgiveness, daily striving to lead God pleasing life, and being blessed by His presence with us.

And the peace of God, that surpassed all our understanding, keeps your minds and hearts in Jesus Christ. Amen.