

Jeremiah 23:23-29
Psalm 82
Hebrews 11:29-12:2
Luke 12:49-56

Sermon August 14th, 2022

“Jesus Comes to Bring Fire to the Earth”

In our gospel this morning, Jesus tells his disciples that he has come to bring fire to the Earth.

Now, fire carries with it a variety of meanings in the Biblical narrative. Fire can mean to purify, to cleanse something or someone. For example, some will use fire to clean hard to remove substances like grease off of concrete elements or steel construction. Jesus mentions fire as a way of cleansing us on a few different occasions in the gospels.

Fire can mean judgment. In the Middle Ages we see this depicted in Christian art where we see pictures of a place called Hell engulfed with flames. There are a few places where Jesus uses the term Hellfire in the gospels.

Fire can mean the Holy Spirit. Luke talks a lot about the Holy Spirit in his gospel account of Jesus, as well in the book of Acts. On the day of Pentecost, we see that the Holy Spirit comes to the disciples in fire (**Image**).

So, understanding the different meanings of fire in the biblical narrative, what does Jesus mean when he says “I have come to bring fire to the earth?”

Well, seeing that this is Luke’s account of Jesus, it is safe to say that Jesus is saying he has come to bring the Holy Spirit to the earth.

Jesus then goes on to tell us that with this Spirit we will see change happening in our world.

So much so, that it will cause conflict in our community.

Now, for those who are following Jesus. They are desperate for change. Some are suffering in poverty. Some have been marginalized for suffering from some ailment that has been labelled as sin or unclean. Some have been kicked out of their community for doing something hurtful. Some are in a profession that is looked upon with disdain. Most if not all of these people have suffered at the hands of Roman oppression. They welcome Jesus’ words. They welcome change.

And yet, for others in the community, they like the status quo. They are thriving living in the current system. They are comfortable with how things are. For these people, Jesus’ message doesn’t offer desirable change. Jesus’ message is threatening to their wellbeing.

For these people, they push back. They try everything in their power to silence Jesus, which eventually leads to Jesus' crucifixion (**Image**).

Unfortunately, this conflict boils over into the community. Neighbours fight with each other. Siblings fight with each other. Spouses get divorced. Children walk away from their parents.

With change, comes conflict. It is inevitable. Some people long for change, because they are hurting under the current system. Others are doing everything in their power to keep things from changing. Because they are thriving under the current system.

Jesus' purpose isn't to intentionally cause division among us. Jesus is telling us the cold hard truth. I am coming to change things. I am coming to challenge those systems that are oppressive to others. Unfortunately, a consequence of this change is conflict.

Now, we are no strangers to change. We feel an affinity for the disciples. We have been through a lot of change over the past couple of years. Unfortunately, like the disciples, we too have seen divisions, conflict arise as we face change (**Image**). For those of us who were comfortable with the status quo we feel that our wellbeing is being threatened. We are frustrated at all the changes we have had to make. We are pushing back.

For those of us who were suffering under the status quo, who were longing for change, we are embracing these changes. Seeing this as an opportunity to transform the systems that have caused hardships and oppression to members in our communities, into systems that create space for healing and new life for people. Systems that are more reflective of our compassionate side. God's kingdom come. Creating fairness for people who have been treated unfairly.

As the church we are facing a lot of challenges. Declining memberships. Our resources are shrinking making it much more difficult for us to do ministry in our community. Our voice is being drowned out by other voices. The wounds of our past have had an impact on our credibility.

In response to these challenges, we are trying to redefine ourselves as a relevant community for this time (**Image**). We are trying to make changes to address these challenges. So, to rebuild trust. So, to reconnect with younger generations. So, to re-establish our voice within the community. A voice that is more reflective of God's kingdom come. Hospitable, gracious, and life giving.

We are trying to redefine ourselves. But it hasn't been easy. Change is difficult.

Some of us have embraced the changes we are trying to make to address the challenges we are facing. Some of us have struggled with these changes. Wanting

things to be like they used to be. Unfortunately, we have experienced conflict within the church over these changes. We have an affinity for the disciples.

Turning back to our gospel this morning, Jesus has come to bring fire to the earth. Or in other words, Jesus has come to bring the Holy Spirit to the earth, which will help us live out God's kingdom in our world.

And though, Jesus has been met with opposition throughout history. Though these changes that the Holy Spirit has enacted in our world have led to conflict. Though the sacrifices we have had to endure to make these changes have been hard for us to accept.

Jesus' offer of new life through the gift of the Holy Spirit has been so enticing for so many of us to accept. Because this gift gives us hope that even though we face conflict today, peace is a possibility tomorrow. This gift gives us belief that though we live in systems that oppress today. Tomorrow, we will live in systems that reflect God's kingdom. Systems where everyone is welcome. Systems where hospitality, grace, and healing are the norm. This gift gives us comfort that though these changes will come with consequences or sacrifices for our lives, the outcome will be better for everyone. Even us who have been comfortable with the status quo. We will see in this new life the benefits that come when all of society is thriving. And finally, this gift leaves us with a promise that if we take up our cross and follow Jesus, we will see all that God can do to birth new life (**Image**). In our church, and in our world.

Let us pray, loving God, sometimes your message is hard for us to hear, because we see the conflict that arises from your message. We see the challenge and sacrifice this message brings to our lives. But we also see the hope your message brings to our lives. Especially in the midst of our suffering. Open our hearts to believe that you will breathe new life into our community. You will birth new life into our church, and into our world. **Amen.**

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