

Luke 12:49-53

We begin with the lesser and move to the greater. The Apostle Paul is the lesser; Jesus is the greater. We know that Paul was a missionary as an apostle. He traveled throughout Asia Minor, into Macedonia and Greece, proclaiming the Gospel. From one perspective, an earthly one, it would have been better had Paul never made these journeys. Or, that he had traveled only as a tourist, taking in all the sights, but keeping his mouth shut with regard to the Gospel.

Why is this? Because wherever St. Paul traveled, trouble erupted. He was like a fire spreading across Asia and into Europe. Everywhere he went he preached Christ, and the pattern was always the same. Some believed, but most rejected his message; and these became enraged at him. They tried to put the fire out by shutting his mouth, but always Paul refused. From town to town this Gospel fire spread, and in every town, those who believed became burning coals themselves. There were protests and riots as a result. Towns became divided, and so did families. Anger and hatred ensued against Paul and those who received the Gospel. Whole cities were in an uproar. St. Paul had robbed the entire region of its peace. "This man," some even charged, "is a disturber of the peace!" And they were right. From one perspective, the region where Paul traveled would have been better off had he just stayed home.

And now we move to the greater. The same thing can be said of Jesus. Had He never come, but just stayed home, our world would be a much more peaceful place. All the protests and riots, divisions and wars that have come about because some believed the Gospel, and others did not, would have been avoided. There would be no arguments erupting between the various Christian Church bodies; no vicious debates over Baptism and the Lord's Supper; no heated Voters meetings over money and what-not. There would be no anger separating spouses because one attends church and the other does not. Had Jesus just stayed home, we would not have near the troubles that we have.

And the thing is...Jesus knew it! "*Do you think I have come to give peace on earth?*" He says, "*No, I tell you, but rather division.*" Yes, it's true that people are divided over politics, and which sports team they support; but nothing divides people like Jesus. And here is the truth about it...this division will come no matter what we do. We are unable to prevent it. Division comes because of Jesus; because He came to our sinful world.

So here is our temptation: to tone down our loyalty to Jesus so that, at least in our small part of the world, there is less trouble and more peace. If we don't wear Christ for all to see, we will avoid causing trouble, like St. Paul did, in our small neck of the woods.

But we're hypocrites in this. If you, as a St. Louis Cardinal's fan, go up to Chicago for a baseball game at Wrigley Field, do you not wear your Cardinal shirt or cap in order to keep the peace? Do you not cheer on your team because you don't want to cause any trouble? We are more loyal to our sports team than we are to Christ. We'll proudly wear Cardinal red, but we don't want the red blood of Christ to be very noticeable on us when we are with others.

Jesus doesn't just divide families; that division is within us. As God's baptized children, we want to be loyal, but our sinful flesh wants no part of being loyal to Jesus. No wonder there's division in every arena of our life. That division begins within our very hearts.

The only person who was not divided was Jesus. His loyalties were not divided. He had one purpose, one aim - to go the cross for you. He was not afraid to face all the trouble that would come because He chose to take your place and mine as a sinner. He was not ashamed to wear your guilt and mine openly, and to claim it for His own. And because He bore our sin and guilt, your God has declared peace with you. The troubles that our sins have caused are charged to Jesus. He faced God's wrath so that you will not.

And so Jesus has become your peace. The world defines peace as the absence of trouble. This kind of peace Jesus does not give. His peace may well bring troubles from the world. All who live in loyalty to Christ will suffer as He suffered. If you want the world to love you, then separate yourself from Jesus. If you want no trouble with the world, stop living your faith in Christ. And to be sure, our flesh urges us in this direction; but it's not where the Holy Spirit leads us. He leads us here to church every Sunday. He leads us into the Word of God, not away from it. He leads us to the Communion Table for forgiveness and life. He leads us to our Baptism daily to be assured of our place in God's family.

There may be division in the world because of Jesus, but there is no division between God and you. Fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, may be divided within families, but within God's family your place is secure. This is the peace Jesus gives - not to make the world a more peaceful place for you; not even to remove troubles from within our families. Jesus gives God's peace to you. He sets your heart at peace. He forgives you. God has no anger against you; no punishment awaiting you. Your sins are forgiven, and this is what real peace is all about.

The only way to have a world at peace is for no one to believe the Gospel, or for all to believe it. Neither one will happen. We await the peace of heaven where perfect peace will abide; where sin cannot enter; where all are God's saints.

There should be, and there is, a reflection of that peace now within Jesus' church. Peace comes through the blood of Christ; through sins forgiven by that blood. All of you are God's forgiven ones, covered with Christ's blood in your Baptism. And those who are forgiven, forgive others. It's what they do because Christ lives in them. And so your Christian congregation...this congregation, is a place of peace because here God's forgiveness is given to us, and we, in turn, forgive others.

Until we arrive in heaven, where perfect peace reigns, we are able to gather here each Sunday to have a taste of that peace. Think of someone who is a long way off from the shore. He's in deep water. He cannot swim very well. All he can do is to come up for air at regular intervals filling his lungs with oxygen.

That's us. We're drowning in this world filled with troubles. We're weighted down with so many burdens that makes it impossible for us to swim very well. The world pulls us down. But at regular intervals the Holy Spirit lifts us up here in the gathering of Christ's saints. Here we are able to breathe. We take a break from the world and breathe in the rich oxygen of God's gifts. Here our sins are forgiven. Here we sing the Gospel in hymns and liturgy. Here is the Lord's Supper for us. Here God's Word is given. Here we are given peace. This is how God's saints make it to shore. Not by swimming like powerful Olympic athletes, but by coming up for air Sunday after Sunday for our entire life.

Do you see the shoreline? God's saints triumphant are there waiting for us. St. Paul is there with all who believed his message. They made it through all the troubles the world threw at them; and they're cheering us on. "It's not how well you swim!" they cry out to us, "Just keep coming up for air. Stay loyal to Christ. He is with you. He will not fail you."

The shore of heaven is coming. It's in the horizon. Once we're there, no more struggles, no more troubles. Only perfect peace. Let us, dear saints in Christ, encourage each other. If someone among us has stopped coming up for air, let's go to them and bring them back here to God's place of peace where the air of His grace is given richly. We will do this because we are not divided. We are family, one in Christ, and one with each other. Amen.