

Luke 12:49-53

He was an elderly pastor and he had been through plenty over the years. He had pretty much seen it all—nothing much surprised him anymore. But one day he was taken off guard when one of his members approached him after church. “Pastor,” he said, “do you have to be so negative from the pulpit? You make me feel bad when you preach against my ‘sins.’ You make it sound as though I am a wicked person. Can’t you use different language? Instead of call them ‘sins’ and using words like ‘evil’ and ‘wicked,’ how about using words that are less offensive to me?” The elderly minister took his parishioner to the church storage closet. He took a bottle of poison off the shelf and he asked him, “Do you want me to remove the word ‘poison’ from this bottle and put a less offensive word in its place? Or should we keep using the words ‘poison,’ ‘sin,’ and ‘evil’ so that people know just how deadly these things are?”

You don’t have to travel far to find a church which uses “non-threatening” language; where the over-arching goal is to make you feel welcome, and thus, words that may offend you and make you feel bad are replaced with “feel-good theology.” The prophet Jeremiah tells us that it was the same way in his day. Lying prophets abounded who told the people, not the truth of God, but what they wanted to hear. “They proclaim ‘peace, peace’ when there is no peace, says the Lord.”

And today, if you wanted to, you could find a place where you hear words like these: “You don’t need to confess your wrongs as long as you feel sorry in your heart.” “You don’t need to hear God’s word of absolution as long as you love Him in your heart.” “And as long as you try to be good, you’re on the right path—God won’t hold anything against you.” But these words are not from God; they are from the Father of Lies. He delights in making you think that all is well even though all is not. He gives you a false peace and a false hope. And people flock to this false message. Pastor Joel Osteen has one of the largest congregations in the country, and he is quite proud of the fact that he preaches nothing offensive—no Law, no sin, no word of condemnation.

Is that what you want? Do you want your pastor to remove the label which says “poison” and replace it with something else? Do you want to hear how good you are—that you’re living fine lives before God—you’re all on the right path; no need to change a thing? Everybody goes to heaven, even if they persist in sin; even if they neglect to hear God’s Word; even if they stay away from the body and blood of Christ? As long as someone says he has God in his heart (whatever that means), all is well and good. Is that the kind of message you really want to hear?

If so, then you won’t like today’s Gospel. Jesus says in Luke 12, “Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.” We don’t much care for these words, do we? We prefer to hear Jesus say things like “Come unto Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” These words are much easier on the ears. Not so offensive. Not so rough around the edges. But think of this... what about those people who do not heed Jesus’ call—who do not ‘Come unto Him’ for rest? What if some of those people live in your neighborhood; in your family; under your roof? Then there is division, isn’t there? Because there is nothing in this world that divides people more than Jesus Christ.

You and your spouse may not like the same television shows, and yet you're not divided. Your family members may all enjoy different hobbies, and yet there is no great division among you. We all have different tastes, different fashion ideas, differing personalities. But, no problem. Mom and dad, brother and sister, in-laws and out-laws—we're still united together as one. But when we're divided over Jesus Christ...then there is division. When one spouse heeds Jesus' words, "Come unto Me," and the other spouse does not, there is division. Husband and wife are not one in Christ. When a son or daughter leaves the church of their youth to join a church which teaches Christ's words in a different way, then there is division. When a member of the family persists in a sinful life contrary to the teaching of Christ, that family becomes divided.

And such divisions are painful. Nations and peoples go to war fighting about religious differences, and we read about it in the paper; but when that war erupts under our own roof, then it hurts. But that's the way it is and always has been. Cain killed his brother, Abel, because they worshipped God differently. Abel worshipped in "Spirit and in Truth," and Cain did not. And since that time marriages, families, peoples, have been divided—fighting and arguing about the truth of God in Jesus Christ. "Father against son," says Jesus, "and son against father; mother against daughter and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

And Jesus is not the problem. His Word and Sacraments are not the problem. There is one truth and that truth is Christ. His Word is truth. But the Father of Lies has turned us away from the truth of God. He has twisted the meaning of God's words. He would have us look for God's truth not where it is rightly proclaimed, but within our own darkened minds. "What God's Word says to me" is one of his favorite phrases to have us say. He wants everyone to believe what is "good and right" for him and her, not what Christ and His Church has always taught.

And so there is division. Division among nations, within congregations, and among families. But have comfort—there is no division between Jesus and you. Even if there is division in your marriage, Jesus has joined Himself to you in your baptism. Even though your family members may be divided over the teaching of Christ, He unites Himself with you here in His body and blood for you. There is one Christ, not two. There is one way to heaven, not many. And blessed are you when you cling to the Christ who gave Himself for you on the cross of Calvary and who gives Himself to you in His Word and Sacraments; believing that in Him, and in Him alone, you have eternal life in heaven. Blessed are you when, even though others in your family forsake Him, you still cling to Him; not because you're better than they are, but because you confess that He is your one and only Savior from sin, death, and hell.

Jesus is, of course, absolutely right. There is no peace on earth and there never will be. And there may not even be much peace right now in your marriage, and in your family—maybe not even within your own heart. Do not despair. God is at peace with you for Jesus' sake. Yes, you and I are wicked sinners. No, we do not deserve to have our God be at peace with us. But Jesus came to drink the poison for you. The fire He brought to earth ate Him up on the cross. He died for you there. He paid the price, there, for your evil thoughts and ways. Therefore God is at peace with you even when you sin against Him.

Does this mean that you can go off and live a life of sin? Does this mean that you are free to neglect God's Word and Sacraments? Why would you drink the poison that Christ already drank for you! Why would you live your life in the fire that already burned up your Lord on the cross for you! Christ has freed you from your sin, not so you can continue living in it, but so you can live in the peace and joy of His forgiveness.

And you are forgiven. The divisions in your family cannot stop God from declaring that He forgives you; for this is truly His word to you. You are forgiven, period. Not because you try to be good. Christ died for you, so you are forgiven. The deadly poison of your sin will not kill you eternally, for Jesus is your living Lord who fought and won your battle for you. He was given gall to drink and He drank it for you. He was baptized with the flames of hell on Calvary so that in Him, heaven belongs to you.

And all of this is yours in Christ. Even though so many others reject Him and do not live their lives in Him, Christ Jesus is yours right now. All the divisions in your life and family cannot prevent Him from being yours, and you from being His. And He is yours because He joined Himself to you in Baptism and because He unites you to Himself through His flesh and blood and through His living Word. And so for you, friend, all is well—because in Christ, all good things are yours. Amen.