

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, August 14, 2022.

“The Fire that Jesus Brings to Earth”

Jesus says in our Gospel for today that he came to bring fire to the earth and how he wishes it were already kindled! The fire Jesus is talking about is a baptism. This baptism will change the landscape of the earth, religion, and families. It could even bring division in our nuclear families.

Fire, when contained, can be very helpful... like at a campsite at the end of the day when you can experience the joy of s'mores.

Fire can heat your home, make your gas engine run, cook your favorite foods.

Fire can cleanse or refine. In Malachi 3:2, The word of God is described as a refiner's fire that can change our hard hearts and bring us to a place of repentance and renewal.

Fire can also be destructive, as we have seen with wildfires in the Western United States, or in France. Fire can destroy life, people's property, and much needed forests.

There is no doubt, fire changes things. And yet, even out of destruction, fire can bring new life.

This is not meek and mild Jesus talking here in the Gospel. He is talking to his disciples about the cost of following him.

Following Jesus' teachings and the way of the cross will put you at odds with people and the world... maybe even people in your own family.

C.S. Lewis once wrote in *Mere Christianity*: “I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity.”

How many of you have division in your own family? This is a painful experience, isn't it? It might be between a parent and child, or with in your in-laws, or among siblings. It may be over differences of opinion, money, political leanings, religion, or ethics.

Everyone seems to have their own truth these days. And truth seems to be more synonymous with opinion. So where do we ground ourselves as followers of Jesus? In the word of God... Like Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

The baptism that Jesus brings to earth will go through the cross. The cross is scandalous, and will challenge people's beliefs at their core about power and success. It will show that God's power will be made perfect in weakness. It will comfort us in knowing that God isn't with us just in the good times, but in our crisis moments too.

Following Jesus and his kingdom's values could bring division in our own households, churches, friend groups, or businesses. It may cause you to quit a job, leave a community, vote differently, attend a rally, or stand up for justice for the poor or the voiceless.

Finally, Jesus says that some people are pretty good at reading the weather signs but are blind to the sign from God that is happening right before them... the ministry of Jesus among them. Jesus says the timing to recognize him as God in human flesh is now. It is so urgent that you must tend to your relationship with God now and don't wait till the judgement day. If you try to time the market on judgement day, you may miss out. Jesus uses the example of two people on their way to court. Jesus says, try to settle or reconcile with your accuser before it gets to the judge. Once it gets to the judge, it is out of your hands and might be too late.

The fire that Jesus sends us in our baptism is the Holy Spirit that awakens and creates faith in us. The Holy Spirit uses God's Word to refine us daily.

As hard as this text is to hear, Jesus didn't come for the narrow purpose of causing strife within our nuclear families. He did not come to create pain between parents and children or spouses and in-laws.

Jesus came with a greater purpose. He came to save us trying to live up to every jot and tittle of God's law in order to be saved. He came to forgive our ways we turn away from God daily and follow the ways

of the world. He came to create a new family that requires loyalty to the larger human and ecological family.

Amen!