

*49 "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! 51 Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! 52 From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; 53 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."*

*54 He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. 55 And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. 56 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?"*

It seems like it is a very un-Jesus-like thing for Jesus to say. For when Jesus was born did not the angels sing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace, goodwill among people"?

And when the old man Simeon first saw the baby Jesus did he not sing, "Lord now let your servant go in peace."

And in the Sermon on the Mount did not Jesus declare, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God"?

And do we not call him the Prince of Peace?

"Did Jesus not declare to his followers, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

So how could this same Jesus ask, "Do you think that I have come to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you but rather division! From now on five in one household will be 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 daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

Jesus came to earth to bring divisions – right in our families. How can that be?

Did you come here today so that Jesus might divide your family? I don't think so. I would bet most of us are in the "the family that prays together stays together" camp. You bring your children to Sunday School trusting that they will learn to "Honor their father and their mother." What was Jesus talking about?

Maybe Jesus was talking about the cost of being a true believer. True believers may give money to the poor that other members of the family think should be spent on them. True believers will make a commitment to worship and prayer that will make it clear the God comes first. True believers will talk about their faith and tell others of Jesus even if it should embarrass other members of the family. All of those things could cause division. We know that James and John left their father, Zebedee, in the boat when they left their nets and followed Jesus. Who knows, maybe Zebedee thought they should be honoring their father and stay with him in the family business. That would have been a division Jesus caused.

What about you? Has following Jesus brought disharmony to your family? Division.

Jesus said, "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish that it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!"

What fire does Jesus speak of? The burning up the chaff kind of fire John the Baptizer promised? Or the Spirit giving tongues of fire that sent the apostles pouring out into the street with the message of Christ? Any of that fire hanging around your home or around this church?

And what of the baptism that Jesus said he still needed to have? It was certainly not his going down into the river Jordan to be baptized in water baptism. That baptism had been over for a long time. No, it seems that he used the word baptism here to speak of his dying on the cross. That baptism was stressing him – he wanted it to be over.

But Jesus made it clear that his suffering and dying and being raised was the Father's will for him. He wanted to do the Father's will most of all.

Maybe that is where we should begin in answering all of the questions before us today – wanting to do the Father's will most of all.

What does it mean for your life to put God first? For Jesus it meant suffering and death. For Peter it meant that when the fire of God's Holy Spirit was poured out on him that he became a bold proclaimer of Jesus. He was put in jail a number of times as a result. For Paul it meant a life turned upside down – and lots of jail time for him, too.

What I find in my own life is that the division Jesus brings is not with my children nor even with those outside of the church, but right here in my own heart. Every day there is a struggle between choosing an easy way - not listening to God – not loving my neighbor - a struggle between that and following Christ. Every day I there is the temptation to live as if there is no God and as if everything depends on me and my power. Every day I find the Trinity named, “Me, myself and I” on the throne of my heart rather than the Trinity named Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

What can I do about this?

Die.

That is the baptism Luther says we need every day - drowning the Old Adam in us with all its evil deeds and desires through daily repentance that God might give birth to a new self to live in faith - every day.

That is what Luther says baptism means for daily living, the drowning of our sinful self and the raising up of a new self through faith in God.

There is not much peace for you and me in all of that. Dying, repenting is not much fun – especially when we need to do it every day.

But it is the way that God makes us new – everyday. Amen.