**Sermon for Proper 15-C**

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Aiken, South Carolina**

08-17-25

Luke 12:49–56

It has been said that the world is more polarized than ever. It seems like, whatever the subject, one must take a stand either on one side or the other; there is no compromise. The middle ground has become the no man’s land between the trenches, where the crossfire is incessant, and no one can survive. How did it ever get this way?

Certainly, because of sin, mankind continues to divide itself against each other. But wherever sin has created division, it is actually the gospel that has created even more. The entire world is divided by the Gospel.

Jesus said *51Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.* Well; that, he certainly has. The whole world is divided over the gospel, and the gospel is all about Jesus; who he is, and what he has done.

This, then, is the very wedge driven between and dividing all mankind from one other, because the sinful nature is hostile to God’s holy word.

In no uncertain terms, the gospel tells us the fact that you, and I, and every human soul is, from the moment of our conception, sinful and unclean. This inborn original sin makes us enemies of God, and consigns us to hell.

A long, honest look in the mirror of the Ten Commandments displays the undeniable truth, as our fallen condition shows itself in the blemishes of our thoughtless words, our selfish acts, and even our most closely guarded thoughts and inner desires, which go against God’s expressed will in his law, and earn for us the eternal death penalty.

 In summary, we are sinners; every one of us. Of course, nobody wants to hear that.

But the Gospel also tells us, in no uncertain terms, that God himself, purely out of divine mercy, has saved us all by sending his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to become sin for us.

 He went to the cross to die the agonizing death of crucifixion, and to suffer the entirety of God’s holy and most justified wrath, in your place.

He has done it; therefore, your guilt is removed; your sins are fully and completely forgiven, and your future is eternal life in paradise with the Lord.

Because of Jesus, the hammer of God’s judgment is no longer bearing down upon you. He has received you to himself as his own beloved child.

Whoever believes this Gospel and is baptized has exactly what Jesus has accomplished; but whoever does not believe this remains in their sins, and subject to eternity in the torments of hell.

This Gospel is so very plain and simple, yet, it has divided the entire world. On the one hand, nobody wants to be told that they are a sinner bound for hell.

On the other hand, everybody wants to believe that they have some inherent goodness in them that makes them acceptable to God.

 The sinful nature says “I’m not perfect, but I’m a decent person; I don’t try to hurt anybody; look at all of the good things that I do for people.”

Certainly, it is our responsibility to be good citizens. But civil righteousness is not the righteousness demanded by God.

 There are plenty of peaceful, law abiding atheists walking around, along with a great crowd of other unrepentant, unbelieving, sinful people, living quite orderly, even successful lives, as the world counts success.

 Perhaps you know some of them by name. Perhaps some of them are quite near and dear to you.

Maybe they are relatives from whom you’ve become estranged, or friends with whom you’ve parted ways, because of your faith.

 The gospel divides people and communities into two groups; Christians, and everyone else; the saved and the lost; those whose god is the Lord, and those whose god is any number of idols, which are, in reality, any number of masks behind which hides Satan, the prince of this fallen world.

The Gospel has even divided the church. It is an undeniable, heartbreaking fact that the church on earth is divided.

 This is because, within the church, the gospel has been obscured, so that most do not understand that we are saved fully and completely by Jesus’ work alone, and not by anything that we ourselves could ever do.

Yet, the Scriptures are clear on this, and also the fact that even faith in our complete and full atonement through Christ alone is not something that we decide for ourselves.

It is the Holy Spirit, working through God’s word, who creates this faith within us. Only by the grace of God do any of us believe this gospel.

 Most of Christendom has strayed from the teaching of Jesus and the apostles, and add to Jesus’ complete, saving work something more that we must do ourselves in order to win God’s favor; as if God in the flesh dying on the cross was not enough to completely absolve our sins, and give us salvation.

Jesus said *50I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!*  He was speaking of his crucifixion.

It is no coincidence that, in the Greek, the word translated as “accomplished” is the same as Jesus’ final dying word from the cross; “finished.”

 On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus was in distress until his work would be finished. From the cross with his last breath, he declared; “It is finished.”

The entirety of the Gospel in three words; but how few believe it; and so, the world is divided, even dividing the church herself.

It is a fire that Jesus Christ has cast upon the earth. The holy Gospel is a fire that refines. It purifies. It consumes and it hardens; and you are being refined every day.

For the Christian, the world is a crucible. In this crucible, your life is being refined to show more and more the precious metal of the Spirit of Christ living in you and guiding your life.

 The sinful dross is burned off in a life of repentance and faith in God’s forgiveness. The metal is tempered by the sufferings that you must bear.

Through it all Jesus himself walks with you, enlightening you more and more to the fact that, when you have him; and you do, then you have all that you really need.

He who suffered and died to give you heaven will not leave you to pointlessly wallow in the many physical, emotional and spiritual pains of this world. He will provide all that you need to get through, and in the process, strengthen your faith in him.

It has been said that the world is more polarized than ever. Tensions run high, people fly off the handle, and are quick to resort to violence.

 Is actually it worse than it has ever been, or is it the firehose of information drowning us in conversations and events that we never would have been aware of in times past? I don’t know. Probably a little of both; these things feed off of each other.

But you can discern the times. You know that Jesus has told us that in the last days perilous times will come. We can only expect, then, that as the world winds down, and as Jesus’ return gets closer, the Gospel divide will widen, and the tension in the world, especially between the saved and the lost, will increase with the divide.

When the world gets you frustrated, and anxious, and down, remember that you belong to Christ. Remain in him through prayer, and word, and sacrament; the fire will not consume you; only refine you into who God has already made you, and declared you to be; his own righteous, most beloved child. Amen.