

## Proper 15C 2016 Sermon

August 14, 2016

### *Luke 12:49-56*

*Jesus said, "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the 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 her daughter-in-law  
and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."*

*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. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. 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?"*

*[Much of what I share today comes directly from Prof. David Lose]<sup>1</sup>*

“What does it cost us to go to Church? ... A chance to sleep in? [An hour on Saturday night?] A free Sunday morning? The ten or twenty bucks [we] put in the offering plate? Odds are, if we stop to think of it, it costs us very little to be a Christian today, since even in an increasingly ‘post-Christian’ culture, going to church, if no longer quite the norm, at least occasions little comment.

“Not so, of course, in Jesus’ day. As Jesus indicates in [today’s Gospel], those who followed him were regularly thrust into conflict and division, often with their own family members. To follow Jesus, you see, was to question the religious and economic and even political status quo. If you were Jewish, it meant accepting as the Messiah this itinerant rabbi who hung out with disreputable sinners, and preached a message of love and forgiveness. It meant... accepting as Messiah one who looked almost nothing like the warrior king David they had expected. If you were Gentile, it meant accepting as the Messiah one who looked almost nothing like what [your] culture held out as powerful or important.

“Moreover, following Jesus meant not merely adopting new beliefs, but a new way of living. To be a *follower* of the one who accepted and even honored the disreputable meant that **you** needed to do the *same*, rejecting the easy temptation of judging others and instead inviting them into our lives. To be a follower of the one who preached love and forgiveness was to *practice* love and forgiveness, particularly when it comes to those who differ from you, even – and maybe especially – in terms of what they believe.

“[Yes,] naming yourself a Christian [in Jesus’ day and St. Paul’s day] had a much greater societal cost and even personal risk associated with it than it does now. But I wonder.... I wonder if **we** might also find *ourselves* thrust into conflict and division with those we care about if we welcomed into our homes and congregations and social circles those whom society shuns. What would be the reaction of our family and friends and co-workers if we *really acted* like Jesus did? [Breaking social customs and religious laws regularly and blatantly, all for the sake of compassion and love of neighbor?]

“...Too many people have thought over the centuries that right religious practice and beliefs should *exempt* you from the suffering or disaster or poverty or even death all around you. In this regard, I believe little has changed. Think, for instance, of the popular Christian obsession with ‘accepting Jesus into your heart’ as the means by which to escape eternal punishment and secure an eternal reward. But what if faith isn’t about guaranteeing future bliss but rather is an invitation to live differently *now*, to see those around us neither as souls to be saved or threats to be deterred, but rather to see them – everyone! – as God’s children to be loved, honored, and cared for?

“Or, perhaps closer to home in this election season, think of how routine it has become for political candidates to close every speech with ‘God bless America.’ Yet throughout the Bible blessing always comes with an *expectation*, even an *obligation*, to extend that blessing to others. [In God’s call to Abraham, God promised him, ‘... I will bless you... *so that* you will **be** a blessing... and through you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” -Genesis 12:2-3. God doesn’t bless Abraham for the sake of his tribe or nation alone, but for the sake of **all** tribes and nations.] *America* has been blessed – richly – and from those who have been *given* much, much is also expected. [As Jesus said - Luke 12:48] So what would it cost a candidate to close speeches with, ‘God bless America *so that* America can be a blessing to the world!’? [It would certainly be a FAR more *Biblical* statement!]”<sup>1</sup>

But that’s not how political campaigns have worked. Mention is rarely (if ever!) made of how America can bless others. Rather, we want to keep ‘others’ out and we want trade that benefits **us**, not others – despite the fact that the entire Biblical witness tells us to welcome strangers. Jesus says, ‘Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then... you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked.’ (Luke 6:35 NLT)

What would it cost us if we were truly to **act** as Christians, to live our lives according to the example, the spirit, the love and the teaching of Jesus? It probably wouldn’t cost our lives, as it did Jesus and almost all his disciples; but it would certainly cost us more than a few hours on Sunday morning and a pledged percentage of our income. For just as in his own day Jesus’ words and actions

upset society's and the church's status quo, so also in our day Jesus' words – if taken seriously and lived out – will upset the status quo of church and society.

So, how can we encourage one another – in our worship, Christian education, fellowship, and service – to *live like* Jesus, rather than simply *believe in* him while *living like* the rest of the world? “How would we imagine worship, preaching, Sunday school, [Adult Forum, men's and women's Bible studies,] and even coffee hour if our goal were to equip one another to enter more deeply into our faith so that it might shape more palpably our lives?”

I am absolutely convinced”<sup>1</sup> that, if we were to stop for a moment, put our egos aside, and look deep into our souls, we would find there an almost desperate longing for “our faith to matter, to be useful, to shape the way we think about our work, our families, our money,”<sup>1</sup> our relationships with our neighbors near and far, and more. Yet most of the time, I fear, we **don't** live our lives from that inner soul-space, from our identity in Christ. Rather, we allow our lives to be run by our egos, that part of us that is curved in on itself (to use St. Augustine's phrase) – our false selves, which are governed by – and respond to – the *world's* values. Yet St. Paul exhorted us, “be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” Or as Richard Rohr said in a meditation this past week, “*the false self can never understand the Gospel.*”<sup>2</sup> If we live out our lives breathing nothing but the air of our culture (except for maybe an hour on Sunday morning), we will never understand – or live into – the Gospel.

Fr. Rohr relates how he gave a sermon one day on non-violence, and after the service a businessman came up to him and said, “Well, Father, maybe in an ideal world. . . .” Recalling that statement, Fr. Rohr writes, “I know he meant well, but that's what we've done with most of the teaching of Jesus. We interpret his meaning for some ideal world [thus it doesn't apply to the real world]. Of course, the ideal world is never going to come so we can just *ignore* 99% of the actual teaching of Jesus, as the institutional church (and I too!) have usually done. . . . In other words, we've tried to have a church without fundamental transformation. Thus we whittle down the whole Sermon on the Mount, and. . . we look for absolutes in ever new secular places—like the 2nd Amendment to the United States Constitution. . . . And this is done by a vast majority of Bible-quoting Christians.”<sup>2, 3</sup>

“But what if we. . . [were to see] Church not as an obligation or spiritual destination, but rather as a place to come to be encouraged, equipped, and sent to make a difference in the world. And a place to return to when living like Jesus creates division. Because it will [as Jesus tells us in today's Gospel]. But it will also create joy. Because the one who sends us out was himself baptized by fire. . . – and is now both with us and for us as we come to church to be reminded of our identity as God's beloved and are sent out again in mission [like the sign above our door says] to tell others in word and deed that God loves them as well.”<sup>1</sup>

God bless America, and God bless us – not for our *own* sake, but that we might be a blessing to the world, following in the upsetting, transforming footsteps of Jesus.

AMEN

<sup>1</sup>**[Pentecost 13 C: Pursuing a Faith That Matters](http://www.davidlose.net/2016/08/pentecost-13-c-pursuing-a-faith-that-matters/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+DavidLose%2FIsqE+%28...In+the+Meantime%29)**, Posted: 09 Aug 2016, [http://www.davidlose.net/2016/08/pentecost-13-c-pursuing-a-faith-that-matters/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+DavidLose%2FIsqE+%28...In+the+Meantime%29](http://www.davidlose.net/2016/08/pentecost-13-c-pursuing-a-faith-that-matters/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+DavidLose%2FIsqE+%28...In+the+Meantime%29)

<sup>2</sup>“Love Is Who You Are,” Thursday, August 11, 2016 <https://cac.org/love-is-who-you-are-2016-08-11/>

<sup>3</sup>An example of what Fr. Rohr is talking about can be found in the recent statements of Jerry Falwell, Jr., in which he said that “social issues” (and by that I assume he means caring for the poor, the homeless, racial relations, etc.) – social issues are at the bottom of the priority list, because we have to “save our country first: control immigration, stop terrorism, and bring jobs back to the country... Many pastors tell me that what difference does it make what happens with social issues if we lose our country? We've got to save our country first.” <http://www.npr.org/2016/07/21/486854408/political-star-power-comes-out-for-day-3-of-the-republican-convention>