

# Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

## IN PURSUIT OF PEACE

Luke 12:49-56

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 15)

Analysis by Bill White

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?

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## DIAGNOSIS: CHRIST'S COMING CREATES CRISES

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *We Want Peace, But How Or By Whom*

Can We Achieve It? Human beings throughout history have longed for peace and through a variety of means have worked to obtain it. A traditional understanding is that peace is a state of harmony and tranquility between individuals and/or nations; peace is the absence of war, conflict and violence. The disciples have accepted Jesus call to follow, and throngs are seeking him out as well, some wondering perhaps, could this Jesus of Nazareth be the long-awaited Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)?

But Jesus says he did not come into the world to bring this kind of peace (v. 51). On the contrary, Jesus coming into the disciples' world (and ours too!) creates a crisis. This is not crisis in the sense of emergency. Rather, this kind of crisis is a sure-to-occur moment of decision about life and truth. The times will surely come when would-be disciples of Christ find themselves in situations where they will have to make critical decisions: "Will I turn toward this person or that one? What do I value? In my time of crisis, whom will I follow?"

We want to obtain the traditional kind of peace in our families, in our churches, in our daily lives and in our world. That is what we want, not division! Not only does Jesus not offer the kind of peace we desire, he says if we do follow him it will cause division and disrupt what "peace" we might have among peoples, friends, and even families (vv. 51-53). So what do we do? We want peace and we want to be followers of Christ, but Jesus seems to be saying the two do not go together. We have a crisis on our hands! The problem is we must decide how to proceed in pursuit of peace.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** : *Know Jesus, No*

## *Peace*

The problem is worse than just choosing a peace strategy to pursue or the right peace movement in which to participate. In our pursuit of peace, we may say we are with Jesus and are following his lead, but where, really, is our faith? When the moment of decision comes (the moment of crisis) who or what do we really fear, love and trust? We place our faith in governments ("If we can just get rid of the Romans and restore the Davidic monarchy." "If we can just get the right president elected!" "If we can just get that evil regime out of power and replaced with a legitimate one."). We place our faith in strategies, systems and policies ("If we can just get everyone to the table and really listen to one another." "If we can just convince all the right people to rely on diplomacy we can end this conflict." "If we can just get the right legislation passed."). We place our faith in military power to bring about and maintain a lasting peace. We place our faith in advocacy organizations to bring about peace. We place our faith in counselors to bring about peace in our relationships. We place our faith in our own abilities to bring about peace in our families. For some the crisis may even be a family member demanding that we choose between Jesus and them, and if we want to achieve peace in our home we must choose the family member's way over Jesus' way!

## **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem ) : No Jesus, Never Peace**

Worst of all, having placed our faith in anything and everything other than Jesus Christ, we will be found to have aligned ourselves with the wrong peace movement. God is judging the world in Jesus of Nazareth ("fire," v. 40) and to our dismay we will discover that at our critical moment not only have we not been instruments of peace, we have actually been instruments of division! Moreover, with no faith in Jesus comes God's judgment

that we will never experience true peace. All of the hopes, beliefs, strategies, and effort that we relied upon in pursuit of peace are burned-up; and so are we.

## **PROGNOSIS: The Gospel Empowers Correct Choices in Times of Crisis**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Jesus the Source of Real Peace***

God is indeed judging the world in Jesus of Nazareth ("fire," v. 49) and Jesus' impending passion ("baptism," v. 50) does indeed create crisis. But this crisis is the kairotic moment of God's truth grounded in the baptism of Jesus' own suffering and death on the cross. At the cross Jesus takes God's fiery judgment (of us!) upon himself and there he conquers all of the forces of sin, evil and death arrayed against God's gift of eternal peace. Ironically, the crucified and risen Jesus is now the source of God's real peace (though it still may not look like the peace we think we want).

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Know Jesus, Know Peace***

Moreover, the fire that Jesus now brings is not just the fire of God's judgment. Fire also symbolizes purification and the Holy Spirit. The crucified and risen Lord Jesus now comes to us in the purifying power of the Holy Spirit offering to exchange our impending judgment for his, offering to take our misplaced faith and exchange it for real living faith, offering to swap our desires and perceptions of peace for his. Yes, we have a crisis on our hands! We have a choice to make. In our moment of decision will we embrace God's free gift of faith in the crucified and risen Christ and truly trust him to bring us peace? The Good News is that the Holy Spirit enables and empowers us to choose to follow Christ and cling to him by faith. And the same Holy Spirit works in us the peace of Christ

that surpasses all human understanding. This peace gives new insight, understanding and perspective into all other meanings of peace. As the bumper sticker says, "Know Jesus, know peace."

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Real Peace Is Available in Christ***

Better still, those who receive this gift not only know the peace of Christ in their own lives (even and especially in the midst of disturbance and division), but they are also empowered by the Holy Spirit to pass this peace on to others who are in pursuit of peace. It is true that the coming of Christ causes crisis. But it is also true that these crises are opportunities for us to be God's instruments of blessing, blessing others with real peace, the peace of Christ which surpasses all understanding. May the peace of Christ be with you!