

Luke 12: 49-56

Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Fred Harrell

August 18, 2024

The Peace Jesus Opposes

Dr. Edgar Watson, around 75 years old, didn't mince words with me. I was in ninth grade. I had the county football championship coming up in a few nights. I had developed what I believe he called a "dermopolyp" right where a strap on my shoulder pad crossed over. It had become infected. It had to be removed.

"I'll have to cauterize this to close it up after I cut it off."

Pro tip: When you hear the word "cauterize" from a doctor, RUN. I smelled my flesh burning, I screamed, cursed, and then it stopped. "It was painful, I know, but look, it's healed up." Healing is usually painful at first.

Did you come to church today expecting to hear Jesus say "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!"

What? Prince of Peace much? My peace I give to you much? What happened to peace-loving Jesus? Well, there is a peace that Jesus opposes.

#1 First big idea: Jesus is STRESSED!

Jesus says "what stress I am under." Someone says, "Yes, he sounds stressed!"

How refreshing. If you are stressed, feel no shame. Jesus felt it too. The stress Jesus feels is the stress of what the systems of this world do to you when you go against the status quo, when you identify with people who remind you that all is not well with this world. When you expose the power structures that have rigged the system in their favor. As Jesus did.

Jesus says "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!"

The fire Jesus brings in Luke is referring to a refining fire. The kind of fire that has to break down and purify before it can be healed.

Jesus is headed to Jerusalem, knowing the Empire's fate for those who speak truth. The mob will be loud, anxiety will rise, and he will be scapegoated to create a false sense of peace. Anyone who leads like Jesus will face the same fate. Speaking out

against sin, not just as an individual issue but as a systemic one, will bring healing to some and anxiety to others, depending on their openness to the truth.

The healing peace Jesus wants for the world is stressful.

Naming White Supremacy, Homophobia, Sexism, Nationalism, Racism, in a church is STRESSFUL.

Disrupting cherished narratives that make us feel good, but do not set us free, is STRESSFUL.

Waking up to your own complicity in systemic oppression is STRESSFUL.

But it is the fire that will set you free. "It's painful, but look, it's healed up." It's what we want for the world, for ourselves, for our church.

The status quo is always easier. Status quo church is easier.

However ...

#2 Jesus Won't Abide the Status Quo

Jesus loves a deeper peace, a truer peace, a real peace, than a false peace that ignores underlying injustices. That's what's going on in this passage. The word "peace" here is also translated, "calm, order, or status quo" according to one commentator.

Jesus is a disrupter of the status quo and that doesn't make him popular. Remember after he preached his first sermon ... they tried to throw him off a cliff.

Jesus isn't trying to pick a fight. Jesus is trying to bring in a new way of being in the world, something he called the "reign of God," what Martin Luther King called "a positive peace which is the presence of justice."

This is the deeper peace that Jesus insists on. Peace that includes justice. Peace that includes truth, especially the hard truth. Pursuing that peace is what the late John Lewis called getting into "good trouble."

We can also apply this at a more personal level.

In what areas of your life right now are you settling for a false peace? In your marriage? In your relationships? With yourself? With those you work with? With your job? With how you self-medicate? There's a façade you have settled for.

In what ways did your family system teach you to present a false peace no matter the dysfunction and even abuse happening inside it? In what ways have you been socialized to “keep the peace” at the expense of others? Worse, of yourself?

As a pastor for 34 years I can tell you dismantling your false peace structures is one of the hardest things I ask people to do, as I ask it of myself, and the most important work of your life in order to be a free person.

#3 Not everybody is on board with this notion of peace.

You might find yourself on an island within your own family system. As so many of you have. Jesus experienced this separation himself as his own family was torn by his ministry. There was a time when his family wanted to bring him home as they wondered if Jesus hadn't had a psychiatric break.

I regularly get calls from pastors realizing they've been operating in a false peace. They know they need to lead with prophetic boldness and drop exclusionary practices which might cost them their job or members. I ask, "What do you think the Spirit is inviting you to do?" They know. And when I hang up the phone, I know that 90% of them will do nothing.

Following Jesus is hard work. To follow his way of love as a way to run the world, to believe in Jesus and his Sermon on the Mount, to believe Jesus as the unimagined solution for a world gone wrong and not merely a chaplain or cheerleader for our favorite version of the status quo is very hard to do. Not everybody is on board with that. Turns out believing in the Prince of Peace who insists on peace **with justice** is hard.

When you speak out about the things Jesus did and disrupt the status quo, people don't respond with, "Oh, thanks for pointing that out! We're glad to see we're complicit in racism — let's change right away! Confronting lifelong assumptions about race and gender? Count me in!" That's just not how people work.

Jesus is saying “expect short-term fall-out.” There will be division. Trouble in the family, between older and younger generations: *“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.”*

Some people read this and say “Oh I get the ‘in law’ part!”

I love my mother-in-law for the record. 😊

This is a timely word for us.

Woody Guthrie said "It's a folk singer's job to comfort disturbed people and disturb comfortable people." Seems like that is also the job of any community centered on Jesus, the disrupter of the status quo.

The peace the church offers is the peace of the crucified community that consoles one another in the midst of the struggle of following Jesus, called to be peaceMAKERS, not peacekeepers.

Peacekeepers maintain the status quo. But peacemakers are change agents in pursuit of fixing the brokenness in our world.

Peacekeepers strive to make everyone happy. But peacemakers strive to make everyone equal.

Peacekeepers call for compromise in the face of injustice. But peacemakers are willing to call out racism, sexism, classism and every other oppressive "ism" even when it makes people uncomfortable.

Peacekeeping is standing in the uncontroversial middle trying to placate "both sides." Peacekeeping is seeking "unity" while refusing to deal with marginalization in our communities. But peacemaking means standing for truth, justice, and equity for all, no matter the cost.

For Christians, the choice between peacekeeping and peacemaking is clear:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Jesus (Matthew 5:9)

Blessed are the peacemakers. Who have the audacity to believe, to insist, that this world and ourselves, can be "all healed up."

Amen.