

Jesus, the Cause of Division
Luke 12:49-56
10th Sunday after Pentecost, Year C August 17, 2025
Choptank Charge Pastor Nan Duerling

Good morning, friends. We hope everyone is doing well and has had a chance to unwind and relax a bit this summer.

This week marks the third and final week of our exploration of Luke 12. In this chapter we've met the rich farmer who needed more barn space to hoard his crops, since he showed no interest in sharing the bounty with anyone else (12:13-21). In addition to warnings about possessions, we've also heard calls to be prepared for Jesus' return (12:32-40). This week, as we turn to Luke 12:49-56 we hear words about Jesus as the cause for division among families, as well as calls for people to properly interpret the signs of the times.

The passage before us today from Luke 12 is very short, but it is divided into two sections: in verse 49–53 Jesus addresses his disciples, but then in 54-56 he is speaking to a crowd. Three different issues are first addressed: fire, division, and baptism. Let's take a look at each one, all of which are related to Jesus' mission. In the second portion, we are again reminded that we need to be aware of the time, particularly as it relates to Jesus' return.

Fire is a common image in the Bible that carries a variety of meanings. The presence of God is often represented by fire, as in the pillar of fire in Exodus 13:17-22 or the tongues of fire that fell upon the people at Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2:1-4. Fire also represents judgment, as well as purification.

Jesus speaks about purifying fire in relation to the division that he brings. It seems ironic that the one who comes to bring peace also brings division, even within the intimate circle of a family. How is this possible? If we think about this idea, it does seem plausible. After all, if we decide to accept Jesus and live as his disciples, we need to make a commitment to him. Even our closest loved ones may not appreciate the changes that may bring in our personalities and/or our priorities.

And that's where the division can easily come in. What happens when not everyone within the family circle decides to make the same commitment? Arguments, hostilities, strained relationships, ridicule—all kinds of things can happen to cause division when one or more member commits to Christ. Some families mete out harsh punishments or will even disown someone who decides to follow Christ, especially in cultures where Christianity is not the dominant religion.

Not even Jesus himself escaped division within his family. Recall that they tried to restrain him when people were saying that "he has an unclean spirit" (Mark 3:30) and that "he has gone out of his mind" (Mark 3:21). But Jesus was well aware of the hostility that was created because of him and his teachings. He speaks about baptism, not as a gentle ceremony with water, but alludes to it as the cross.

The kingdom of God that Jesus proclaims can cause division because it represents a new way of relating to one another. This way, according to David Lose ("Working Preacher," 2010), is marked by *forgiveness*, *courage*, and *humility*. We don't have to stretch far to recognize that those invested in the status quo would not want to see such a radical shift. Many would not want to relinquish whatever power they possess.

Jesus, of course, was teaching people in his own time and place, early in the first century A.D. Likewise, the author of Luke was addressing his own community in their time and place, probably between A.D. 80—90. But now, we are reading these words centuries later in a different time and place. We overhear Jesus talk about reading the signs to discern the weather. He called his listeners hypocrites because they could discern the weather but didn't know "how to interpret the present time" (Luke 12:56). That "present time" comes just a while before Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey, per Luke 19.

And what about us? How committed—really—are we to Jesus? Here are some signs that one is a committed believer. How do you live these out?

1. A love of God that motivates you to make good choices and to act on your faith.
2. A love of neighbor that enables you to be compassionate, generous, and forgiving.
3. A serious desire to live in obedience to Jesus' teachings.
4. A willingness to serve others and put your faith into action.
5. A regular habit of prayer.
6. A willingness to share the gospel of Christ in word and deed.
7. A close relationship with Jesus that includes Bible study, worship, and meditation, along with prayer.
8. A "crop" of spiritual fruit, as outlined in Galatians 5:22-23: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

To sum this up, we can use a well-worn expression: You have to be willing to walk the walk, not just talk with talk. People are more likely to believe what they *see you do*, as opposed to what you *say you believe*. How, then, are you preparing yourself to meet Jesus either "in the air" or at your death?

Let's acknowledge that making preparations to meet Jesus come within the context of living our life. Jesus doesn't call us to stockpile food or live in a bunker. Although he told us to be awake and alert, he also told us, that we do not know the hour when he will come (Matthew 24:36). Yet, despite his clear disclaimer that only God knows when this will be, people through the ages have tried to predict his coming. One group, called The Way, (https://www.lavia.org/EN_ListEnd.html) posted 68 records of inaccurate predictions of the Second Coming, beginning in the year A.D. 909 and running through 2012. There are likely more. Here are just a few, some of which may be familiar to you:

* **Pat Robertson**, American TV preacher, announced in 1976, that the end of the world would occur between **October and November 1982**. When his prediction was not fulfilled, Robertson reported that he contemplated another date; the year of the disaster would be **2006**; it would begin with a powerful tsunami that would befall the American coasts. When this did not happen, the American TV preacher said a third date, **2007**, in which a terrible terrorist attack would devastate the territory of the United States.

* According to Rev. **Lee Jang Lim**, of the **Missionary Church of Tami** in South Korea, at midnight of **October 28, 1992**, Christ would bring together 144,000 elect (Revelation 7) to save them from the world's end.

More than 100,000 people listened to him, and gathered in more than 200 fundamentalist churches. Many left their work and family, giving all their

properties to the Rev. Lee Jang Lim.

With the four million dollars collected from the donations of the faithful, Lim acquired some investment funds, which would be released in 1995, three years after the announced end of the world.

He was arrested a month before the predicted date.

* According to some estimates, including an alleged age of the world, the foundation of the state of Israel, the war of the six days, the fact that Pentecost fell on a Sunday and other things, the expert in numerology **Marilyn Agee** set for **May 31, 1998** the second coming of Christ. When Jesus did not appear, she quoted the letter of James, who writes: "You also have to be patient ... the judge is at the door", maybe thinking that Jesus would stay outside the door a few weeks.

When she accepted the fact that she was wrong, she turned to the Julian calendar to say that it was not Pentecost 1998, but **1999**, and in a final calculation, she indicated **2007**.

* The evangelical engineer **Harold Camping**, preacher of the radio station "**Family Radio**," stated that the day of Judgment would begin on **May 21, 2011**, and would be followed by the end of the world on **October 21st** of the same year. Camping figured these dates through mathematical speculations, and based on his own calculation of the date of creation, which he set in the year 11,013 BC.

This was not his only forecast about an imminent end of the world; he had already set the apocalypse for **September 6, 1994**, a date later postponed to **October 2nd** of the same year. Many people believed him, leaving their jobs and selling their properties in order to follow him.

While I can neither confirm or deny the "facts" set forth in these predictions, it is clear to everyone that they are false. The world is still spinning and we still await the return of Jesus.

So what does all this mean? Should we just give up on expecting Jesus to return? Or should we assume that we don't have to be aware of what's going on, to read the signs, so to speak? No, that's not the answer to either question. But what we should give up on is expecting some human being to give us precise information that even Jesus himself didn't know. Instead of feverishly trying to calculate the date, we need to spend our time LIVING as Christ's disciples.

The importance of LIVING as a Christian disciple cannot be overstated. We don't know when Jesus will return. Some Christians, as well as those who do not accept Christ, do not believe that he will ever return. They don't believe the words of Acts 1:11, spoken by "two men in white" who appeared at Jesus' ascension:

¹¹ They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?

This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

So where does this leave those of us who have repeatedly experienced the truth of Jesus' words? No one has all the answers here. But we do know that many people have died while awaiting the return that Jesus calls us to watch for. So while we cannot predict the time of Jesus' return, we can be certain that one day we will all meet Jesus as a result of our mortal

deaths.

So, how do we prepare for our own deaths? Again, it is important that we LIVE as Jesus has taught us to live. This kind of faithful living is not easy. It's so much simpler just to go along with the crowd, to at least pretend not to see the wrongs and injustices around us so we don't have to confront anyone. This is definitely an easier way to live, but it's not the way Jesus calls us to live.

Part of our contemporary problem, in Nan's opinion, is that there are no real standards for being a Christian. Especially in the United States, we tend to "pick and choose" what we want to believe and how those choices will affect our behavior. For some people, Christian belief is as far as it goes, while behavior remains unaffected.

Your challenge for this week is to write down what you believe about Christianity. Next to each belief, if possible, add a Scripture to support your view. Then review this list. Write down what you do to live out each one. Are there gaps between what you say you believe and what you actually do? If so, how will you fill in these gaps?

In closing, Nan wants you to know that she is making small improvements each day. She is feeling much better, but not like herself yet. Your prayers and remembrances are very much appreciated.

Love, Nan