

Church of All Nations

Luke 12:49-56

August 17, 2025

We have spent a few week in this section of Luke, with its emphasis is upon warnings of becoming ensnared in love of money and possessions, a call to readiness, alertness, – but not just so we will be ready when the future appears, - so we know how to live today – and today the urgency of the call to discipleship and an appeal to read the signs of the present times.

A number of those themes of money, readiness and signs came together in my household recently when my wife got a fine for gong through a red light. From memory it was \$490 (up to \$510 from July 1 I believe) and that was for entering the intersection half a second after the light had turned red. Expensive! And because I am dong a few calculations on income steams over time as I prepare for retirement - trying not to become seduced by mammon you will be pleased to learn - I thought about fining people for going through red lights. That would pay well. \$490 for half a second. Now there are 3,600 seconds in an hour, so according to my calculations we are being fined by the govt at an hourly rate of three and a half millions dollars. Yep if you had entered that intersection an hour after the light turned red you would be up for 3 and a half million. Be ready and prepared to read the sign and don't go through the red light.

Last week we heard confronting words about the dangers of being seduced by money and possession. This week even our precious families can be an obstacle to the single minded pursuit of the kingdom/reign of God. So often the threat to the best comes not from the worst but the second, third best.

You wonder how Jesus ever got labelled as a “family values” sort of guy...

When a would-be disciple asks if he might bury his dead father before joining him, Jesus scoffs, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead.” (Lk 9:60)

If you think that’s harsh, he not only demanded that his disciples leave their families, but that they *hate* them (Lk 14:26).

And, on another occasion, when informed that his own mother and brothers were waiting outside to see him, Jesus’ waved his hand in the direction of his disciples and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:34–35).

Certainly Christian faith doesn’t make families chipper or hold them together. It might, but often does not. Idolatry of the family is one of the naggingly pernicious blockers to people following Jesus – again, growing out of our tendency to think that the Christian life is about being nice.

At one congregation I was at it was taken to another level appearing on the table of our Lord -

We do tend to clutter it - using the table to hold any objects we use in worship candle, bible, sometimes cross, but one congregation I served in had the word family carved out in wood and placed on the table.

Yet Jesus’ favourite term for the eternal Creator is Father/Abba. An intimate personal name for God. A family designation. And God is definitely a parent in today’s Isaiah passage. A wounded, offended, frustrated parent. Loving parents know the unique heartache and rage that bubbles up when a beloved child becomes enchanted by or entangled in things that lead to their child’s grief or harm. Similar to a parents’ love, God’s anger, holy anger must always be viewed through a lens of God’s love, which may feel fierce and overwhelming, but which we know to be fundamentally good. There is a difference between wrath that is rooted in hatred and wrath that is grounded in profound love. Anger that draws its energy

from hatred is dedicated to destruction and death, but anger that is motivated by love is dedicated to growth and edification.

Jesus today announces in an anguished tone that he is anxious and stressed—anxious to bring on a ministry and its inevitable end that he describes as a work of provocation and controversy, not of soothing assurances and superficial peace. He is on a mission that will strip him and his followers of the comforts of home, family, status and paid employment. All the traditional loyalties will be on the table to be weighed against the graceful reality of the kingdom of God that Jesus is passionately (even recklessly) embodying.

All through this gospel, Jesus' ministry is portrayed as one that brings peace—but along with peace, it unavoidably brings trouble as well. Those who accept the invitation to live in this peace will be, in some sense, at war with those around, as their loyalty and their lifestyle will be out of step with those with whom they would naturally relate, associate and belong. Jesus is the cause of 'the rise and fall of many' and 'a sword will pierce your heart also' ([Luke 2.35](#))

Make no mistake Jesus was not passive. Mahatma Ghandi has sometimes been mistakenly called who practised "passive resistance". Mistakenly because Ghandi was far from passive, in fact going out of his way to break laws, just as did the Rev Martin Luther King. What Ghandi, King and Jesus all practised was non-violent resistance. Which brought all of these 3 great figures head long into conflict with authorities and law makers. The Prince of Peace showed us that the path to peace is via serious head-on collision with the authorities, and involves the tearing of flesh and agonising death..... why should it be much different for his followers?

Harmony, peace at all costs – never works and just leads to cover ups, as some Christian churches are now discovering to a very high cost in the matter of clergy abuse.

Peace is not the absence of war but the creation of an alternative reality, and this doesn't come without challenging the established order.

He is well aware of the adverse reaction he is stirring up with his healing and truth-telling and so he pointedly chooses images of fire, discord and disruption. If the new relationships of the kingdom—undermine the traditions, then so be it. Some things do need to be challenged, even broken.

We in the church mostly spend our time and energies persevering and conserving. At times good things to do, but when they are the only things, you are rightly known as “conservative”, and you become risk adverse, and worry about managing potential situations that may or probably may not arise. Not quite the sort of stuff we read today.

So what is this fire that Jesus is casting on the earth? Jesus never defines it. He just says he is casting it.

Fire is an image commonly used in the Bible for both judgment and cleansing. "Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord, in Jeremiah. (ch. 23:29) When Jesus says that he came to cast fire on the earth, is he not telling us that he comes to pass judgment on the rebelliousness of this world? Surely he is saying that he comes to burn up all the false hopes the world has raised for itself from within its own heart. Jesus' presence is an explosive presence, touching the match to the fireworks that will shower the whole earth with a destroying power that lays to rest any self-confidence in its own ways as though worldly wisdom or power could ever set things right. He casts the fire of destruction over all the aspirations and expectations that arise from within the world, leaving them nowhere to turn other than to the one from whom they came and to whom they go.