

## **Introductory**

This pericope is found only in Luke and does not occur in the one-year TLH lectionary. It is the appointed gospel reading for Pentecost 13 in the three-year LW lectionary. This reading will strike a chord with most of your listeners, whose families probably look a lot like the ones that Jesus describes, more so in America than in most places in the world.

Last week, the reading picked up where the previous week has left off, and it ended with some apocalyptic talk about treasures in heaven. The lectionary omits more and some more specific apocalyptic material, including the exhortation to gird your loins and a short metaphor about the servants being ready for the coming of the master, or not.

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Jesus speaks at a time when there was not religious freedom, when there was therefore much more religious unity than now. With religious freedom comes diversity. The Jesus who prescriptively desires complete unity descriptively observes that full unity will not be had this side of eternity. What he describes will be reality for Christians on this earth.

The temptation for Christians will be and is to seek peace with The World by confessing other than Christ and orthodox Christianity. We all have inhabitants of The World in our families. My family doesn't actually contain many of those. Many of my family are LCMS Lutherans. My in-laws include ELCA, RC, Atheist, None, and several Generic Christians.

We have spoken before about the American experiment with religious freedom, which was actually invented by the Christians early on, then lost. The LCMS experiment with what we like to call "congregational autonomy" has birthed a church body that always has and always will struggle with division, particularly these days over the issue of COWO, or not.

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It is noteworthy that Jesus later follows up His descriptive comments about the plethora of religious opinions and beliefs with the prescriptive exhortation to go ahead and judge those opinions and beliefs. What are we to judge? We are to judge important things; things having to do with God. We are not to judge the unimportant things, like all other things.

I like and use William Barclay's commentary because of his knowledge of the way things were in first century Palestine. I also love it for incredibly simple statements like;

“However much we may wish to eliminate the element of judgment from the message of Jesus it remains stubbornly and unalterably there.” (p. 169) You can’t make that stuff up!

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## Textual Notes

**49.** A few weeks ago, the Sons of Thunder requested that fire be brought down upon a Samaritan village. In the OT, fire happens. That was not the time and place for fire, but there is a time and place for fire. Jesus says “Πῦρ ἦλθον βαλεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, καὶ τί θέλω εἰ ἤδη ἀνήφθῃ – I came to throw fire upon the earth, and how I want it already to be kindled.”

Fire is a rather essential part of God’s creation. Fire sometimes comes from the sky in the form of lightning, and probably pretty early on man learned to make fire for himself. In his book *Cooked*, Michael Pollen talks about the relationship between man, meat, and fire, and what a wonderful thing it must have been when man first used fire to cook meat.

Pollen also points out that humans cook their food, just another of many things that make us distinct from the animals. I talk about those things because for the other 167 hours and 35 minutes, our people are bombarded with the idea that we are nothing special, just another species of animal, higher or lower than the rest, depending on whom you talk to.

In the Bible fire is for two things that have some similarities, but they are different: purifying and judging. On the Last Day every human who has ever lived will be judged, in the scene famously depicted in Matthew 25. Some will be forever cast into fire, and others will enter heaven, where they will receive new bodies and live forever in purity.

But that fire will come later, when God destroys this planet and creates another, better one. I talk about that because for the other 167 hours and 35 minutes, our people are bombarded with the idea that somehow, we are not only capable of destroying the planet, but that we are actively engaged in that destruction – even as we speak. And it’s been politicized.

I don’t speak to the politics of that or any of the other things – pretty much all of them – that have been politicized in America. I am a Theologian, and I talk about God. The Bible teaches us that we are God’s highest creation, and we are to have dominion over and subdue the rest of creation. The Bible teaches that the earth will one day be destroyed by God.

The fire spoken of here will be cast upon the γῆν, the common word for the physical earth, and the aorist infinitive casting of fire emphasizes the act of casting, and the actor doing the casting is God. The meaning here is mostly judging or separating, and the thing He separates are families, and here He is saying that He will be the cause of familial division.

In the third chapter of Luke, Jesus twice speaks of fire as judgment, on either side of John (3:16) saying of Him that He will baptize with “the Holy Spirit and fire.” Later on, and

before this (9:54), the Sons of Thunder suggest calling for fire on the Samaritan village, and after this (17:29), Jesus talks about how fire rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Sons of Thunder seem to have been aware of fire as judgment in the teachings of Jesus, and from the OT, and they wanted to put it into play against the village that had rejected Him, but Jesus put the kibosh on that. Now, He seems to be itching to get that show on the road, but the fire of judgment will not be directed to a Samaritan village, but to Himself.

Meyer says,

The lighting up of this fire, which by means of His teaching and work He had already prepared, was to be effected by His death (see ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν, [Luke 12:52](#)), which became the subject of offence, as, on the other hand, of His divine courage of faith and life (comp. [Luke 2:35](#))

He is both the subject and the object, casting the fire because He is the one who brought it upon Himself. His very being in the kingdom of Satan was bound to cause fireworks, and it did. He comes hurling words and acts that look and sound like fireballs to the unbelieving world, and those words and acts landed Him on the cross, which is where He wanted to be.

It's the way of things for the prophets, like Jeremiah, and it's the way of things for the Apostles, and it's the way of things for Pastors; we know what awaits us should we preach the Word and administer the Sacraments correctly. Some people will love it, and others will not, and some will hate us. Knowing that, we are compelled to proclaim regardless.

It's often the same for bold laymen who proclaim the Word in their everyday Christian Walk, and it's getting worse. The rather new thing is that hatred for the Word is as likely to come from those who bear the name "Christian" as from those who don't. The current Pope, for one, is often more critical of orthodox Christianity than other major religions.

Observing those things and the condition of His Creation in light of that creation having been and continuing to be savaged by man, it should not be surprising that He wants to get this show on the road. He wants to save the world by His death, and He wants the Last Day to come quickly. But of course that is not the call of the Son, but the Father's decision.

**50.** He knows full well what lies on the road ahead, “βάπτισμα δὲ ἔχω βαπτισθῆναι, καὶ πῶς συνέχομαι ἕως ὅτου τελεσθῇ - I hold a baptism to be baptized, and how I am pressed until it shall be accomplished.” The baptism spoken of here is that of tribulation, along with things like “deep waters” a common OT image, one taken to another level by Jesus.

In Mark (10:35), those same Sons of Thunder requested of Jesus that they be given places of honor in His coming Kingdom. His response is to ask them “are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the Baptism with which I am baptized?” a clear reference to the coming suffering and death by crucifixion, and they say that they are.

The verb here indicates one who feels closed in, pressed on every side, unable to escape, like one who is drowning, and he can't get up. The sentence structure makes it clear that Jesus holds in his hand – He controls – His coming baptism of suffering and tribulation, and just as importantly, the thing that needs to happen will be done or accomplished.

If you want to talk about how Jesus was “baptized” in His own blood on the cross, you would not be the first one to do that, but I’m not sure why you would do that or what you gain. If you need a literal “baptism” with water, then you would be better off talking about how He sweated in the garden and probably did that quite a bit through His whole ordeal.

Certain of the Church Fathers recognized a Baptism of Blood for martyrs who died before they received Trinitarian Baptism. I suppose you could make the case that Jesus died sans Trinitarian Baptism, so therefore the Baptism of Blood was needed by Him, a martyr. Sometimes flowery language for its own sake confuses rather than enlightens the hearer.

**51.** He asks them rather rhetorically “δοκεῖτε ὅτι εἰρήνην παρεγενόμην δοῦναι ἐν τῇ γῇ - do you think that I came to give peace on the earth?” The word “peace” is commonly used to refer to the peace (shalom) of God. Jesus did, in fact, come to bring that kind of peace, but He did not come to bring peace with “the earth,” i.e. the planet and its inhabitants.

The Christian lives all the time at peace with God, and we Christians don't want to fight with Jesus, but the non-Christian lives in anything but. The non-Christian will never be at peace with God or with His People. In fact, just the opposite, “οὐχί, λέγω ὑμῖν, ἀλλ' ἢ διαμερισμόν - no, I say to you, but distribution,” which is the complete opposite of “peace.”

Note here the emphatic “ἀλλ - but” emphatically contrasting “peace” and “division.” The more common noun for division (σχίσμα) occurs eight times in the NT, most notably in John. That's not the word here. The word here in Luke, the noun διαμερισμός (division), is a hapax, but the verb form διαμερίζω occurs eleven times in the NT, six of them in Luke.

In Matthew (27: 35), Mark (15:24), and Luke (23:34), the garments of Jesus are “divided” at the Crucifixion. In Luke (11:17) Jesus talks about the silliness of a “kingdom divided against itself,” and in the next verse He talks about “Satan divided against himself.” Later (22:17) He takes the cup at the Last Supper and tells them to “divide” it among themselves.

In Act (2:3) the tongues of fire are “divided” on the head of each of the Apostles, and in later (2:45) Christians voluntarily “divided” their property amongst themselves. The word σχίζω, which does not appear here, refers most often to a division into two parts (like the temple curtain or the Pharisees and Sadducees, Acts 23:7), or a relatively smaller division.

The word διαμερισμός, which does appear here, and its verb form διαμερίζω, often refers to many more than only two divisions. Of course, in one regard there are ever only two

categories of people: Christian or not. But the division caused by Jesus will be both much more severe and also more multi-faceted than just that into two, and we see it all the time.

I actually translated the word “distribution,” and the word “shattering” would also be a descriptive American word for the Greek word “διαμερισμός,” found here. From Adam and Eve, who walked with God to the current – besides Christian and not, Christianity has been shattered into many different pieces, and it impacts every single family in America.

**52.** He then rattles off a laundry list of possibilities, beginning with the descriptive “ἔσονται γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν πέντε ἐν ἑνὶ οἴκῳ διαμεμερισμένοι – there will be from now on five in one house” and three against two, and that’s just the way it will be, and it is. It’s not that you choose that state of being in the household, but manifestly that is its state in most houses.

Barclay points out that familial divisions caused by Christianity “was one of the great reasons why the Romans hated Christianity – it tore families in two. Over and over again a man had to decide whether he loved better his kith and kin or Christ.” It’s one of many reasons why people in America despise orthodox Christianity and Christians like that.

Medieval Christendom was not perfect, but it was a time when our European ancestors had a greater unity and less division than we see today. Allowing for unbelievers, generation after generation believed the same and families found themselves worshipping in the same building with other family members and their neighbors for hundreds of years straight.

You can find the same thing today in a few European countries, like Poland (47%), Italy (37%), and Ireland (32%), where attendance is higher, and even in places like England and Germany, where it is not. In America, 47% of us say we go to church at least once a week. The African Christians – Nigeria (89%), Zambia (85%), and the like, you see it more.

It’s rare to find four or even three generations worshipping together in many congregations. We have a slew of two and three generation families and two families with four generations represented at Immanuel, Grand Mound, Iowa. When I say “represented,” I mean that there are other family members in some of those generations who are not there on Sunday.

Having said all that, even in the Golden Age of Christianity, there were religious conflicts among family members. We are, after all, dealing with sinners. The Reformation cranked those existing divisions up a notch or two, and today it is in the mission field and the United States that we see most clearly religious conflict among family members, often dramatic.

In the mission field people must break with family if they become Christian, and in many cases a former Muslim risks death at the hands of those family members if he becomes a Christian. In many families, the Christian is seen by other family members as the radical, the one whose loyalty to the clan is doubtful. It can be a lonely, as well as dangerous, life.

It was one of the criticisms – there were many – the Romans leveled against the Christians in the Early Church; they broke up families, and they did. More accurately, the Christian religion – which Christians practice – broke up families. Like Jesus said He would. It happened in His own family. It’s the way of things in my family and in your family.

In America, where “religious freedom” is in the Constitution, division among family members has always been prominent. One of the first problems that the Mayflower Separatists faced was what to do with their children who did not want to be baptized and who maybe were not Christians. It caused great division among families and in the Church.

The plethora of religions in America today have taken this whole thing to yet another level. Besides the thousands of denominations (including over forty, up from thirty-seven Lutheran denominations in North America), many Americans are Generic Christians. They have their own set of personal beliefs about Jesus and are often of questionable morality.

These days LCMS parents are happy if most of their children are able to commune with them on Sunday morning, and for many families, religion is a topic more forbidden at family gatherings than even politics. Which is not to say that we can’t or shouldn’t, and it is not uncommon for me to talk religion with non-Lutheran and non-Christian relation.

**53.** We note that Jesus talks about in-laws as well as blood being part of these divisions, speaking of sons and fathers, daughters and mothers, even and maybe especially division between in-laws. The word used to describe what happens to family is “διαμερισθήσονται – they will be divided,” a passive verb meaning that you don’t so much choose it but it’s...

People used to consider religion more than they do today in choosing a spouse. I hammer on that to my young people like I always have, and LCMS to LCMS unions are hard to come by. Even at the Concordias, children seem to find a non- LCMS to marry. That just adds another thing to cause division to other divisions that will come with up in marriage.

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**54 – 56.** Jesus goes on, speaking in a language that was very familiar to “the multitudes” about their ability to discern the weather. We do the same thing, using sayings like, “red sky in morning, sailor take warning, red sky at night, sailor’s delight” and noting things like; when the wind shifts from northerly to southerly it’s probably going to warm up.

The criticism that Jesus levels at the hearers, calling them “hypocrites,” is that they are very capable of reading those kinds of signs, but they refuse to recognize signs that have to do with theological issues, particularly when it comes to the coming of the Christ. Those signs, of course, are there all the time, and the time is near, so we ought to live like that.

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## **Law/Gospel**

**Division/Union** – Division, conflict, and confrontation are part and parcel of life after the fall. We have union with Christ, particularly in the Sacrament, and with fellow believers. Heaven will be perfect union and the complete lack of division, conflict, & confrontation. That will be good news for people who don't like to fight.

**Church Militant/Church Triumphant** – Division, conflict, and confrontation are part and parcel of life after the fall. Christians often find themselves fighting with the World and with other Christians in the lunchroom, at school, and in social settings. Often it appears that we're losing, especially if you listen a lot to mainstream media.

Nine years ago, I said that these days I hear a lot of people simply marvel, in a sorrowful sort of way, at how far we have fallen in so short a time. It's worse now. Like the Book of Revelation teaches, it looks like we are losers (people may verbalize that to us), but we are winners in Christ. Divine Service is a peek into the day of the Church Triumphant.

**Baptism/Baptism** – Like our Lord, we too are baptized with fire. With Him we suffer much because of who we are. The Baptism we received is a precursor to the resurrection and eternal life with Him in heaven. John of Damascus talks about seven different kinds of Baptisms for Christians (ACC).

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## **Sermon Titles**

The Great Divide

Jesus Versus Everything Else

Jesus Against the Field

Fire from the Sky – NOW

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## **Hymns**

Anything from the Church Militant section

Anything from the Church Triumphant section

Rubric: no more than one difficult hymn per Sunday

Rev. Steven L. Anderson

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