

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 12:49-56

"Family Feud"

Today's Holy Gospel talks about being a disciple of Jesus Christ, and how it might possibly mean that you could be misunderstood by members of your own family. Jesus' ministry would bring division because some people would accept what Jesus was saying and others would choose to reject it. Each of us have members of our family that may have decided to go a different way. You know all we can do is love them, and pray for them, and that is just what Jesus said. A true division would arise between those who decided to follow Him and those who refuse to acknowledge Him, turning into a real "Family Feud."

Acceptance can turn quickly into prejudice when it happens right within your own family. Jesus' words in this Gospel reading echo the words from Micah 7:6 which predicts "*For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law-- a man's enemies are the members of his own household.*" If you choose to follow Jesus it is a matter of obeying the call and it is non-negotiable – no matter what the cost!

Jesus' desire was to cleanse people's hearts like a consuming and purifying fire, if you will - a refiners fire. His life and death would be the basis for His judging Israel and that judgment, like that fire, would purify that nation. Jesus spoke fearlessly about this in Matthew 10:34 when He said, "*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*" Jesus begins today's Holy Gospel with these words. "*I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!*" Jesus' use of the word "fire" here comes right out of the Old Testament indicating God's intention to purify His People by purging and through destruction. Jesus is awaiting God the Father to kindle the fire with which Jesus will set certain parts of the earth ablaze. The verses that follow in today's Holy Gospel makes it clear that Jesus is eagerly waiting, and anticipating the fulfillment of all of God's purposes.

Jesus awaits in anticipation the time which God the Father has set for Him to fulfill. Of course, in the end, Jesus will ultimately bring peace through His sacrifice on the cross. In expectation of the "end-times" there will be a time of great distress or tribulation.

The baptism that Jesus spoke of referred to His death which He said would be coming soon. Jesus spoke about His approaching death as baptism when He asked the Apostles: "*Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?*" "*We can,*" they answered. Jesus said to them, "*You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with.*" (Mark 10:38-39) After the Day of Pentecost, when the Apostles ventured out into the world proclaiming the Gospel, each and every one of the Apostles, with the exception of John, would be martyred, offering, and giving their lives for the sake of the church – drinking from the same cup. As far as John – they tried to kill him – boiling him in oil – but he walked right out. You can do your darndest – but if God does not want the man to die

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– the reason being that God had the Book of Revelation to give to him on the Island of Patmos. You see God’s plans always trump everything else.

Jesus could look forward to His baptism and to the “fire” that would be kindled in pretty much the same way that a woman looks forward to having the child that she has carried for nine months. (Speaking to Claire Elliott – she has three girls already and is expecting Nathaniel – we have grown as a parish just through your family 😊 We are so excited and cannot wait!) The anticipation she must feel with every movement and kick, excited for the time that her child would come into the world. She has got to be eager to get on with it, not because it is pleasant and enjoyable, but because of what the end result would be. Think about all of the family members that will have the opportunity to hold a child in their arms, and for that innocent to stare up into their eyes. It is a real blessing to hold your child in your arms – and I know personally, having had two children, and one of them is here with us this morning. Jesus is referring to the “fire” of God’s wrath, first poured out on Him on the cross as He carried all of our sins to completion, and then to be poured out on those who reject Him. Some people might say ‘oh, God loves everybody,’ and while that is true – it is up to you to make the choice. You know the saying – “God loves you just the way you are.” Indeed He does – but He loves you too much to leave you that way. When you give yourself to Jesus Christ you are also giving Him permission to change you to who He wants you to be. Not who YOU want you to be. I want you to listen to these words from John 3:18-19, when Jesus says, *“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”*

After Jesus finished speaking directly to His disciples, He turned His attention to the multitudes of people who surrounded and followed Him everywhere. He wanted them to be sensitive enough to interpret the things that they were seeing. They were following Him and hearing Him, but it was apparent that they were not able to see that He was truly the Messiah. The Christ of God was standing right in front of them. Jesus told them that they could easily interpret natural signs but they could not understand spiritual signs. They could say – ‘oh, there’s dark clouds up there – looks like it is going to rain.’ A time of judgment was coming to Israel, and I believe is coming for the world very soon when Jesus comes again, but these people would waste the opportunity for peace that God gave them. A light was shining right in front of them –in their midst, but they could not see Him. As if they had blinders on.

They needed to understand what was going on right in front of their very eyes. Jesus was offering to them the kingdom of God and they were not responding to His offer. They looked forward to the great and wonderful “*day of the Lord*” as the day of salvation, but they forgot that along with the day of the Lord came judgment. This is what the prophet Amos had proclaimed to them: *“Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD, for what purpose will the day of the LORD be to you? It will be darkness and not light; as when a man flees from a lion and a bear meets him, or goes home, leans his hand against the wall and a snake*

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bites him. Will not the day of the LORD be darkness instead of light, even gloom with no brightness in it?" (Amos 5:18-20)."

The people were seeking signs but they were not seeing. Even though the Son of God was standing right in their midst they could not or would not see Him. The Apostle John's Gospel speaks of the signs that Jesus gave to them. *"Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn--and I would heal them." Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him."* (John 12:37-41) You might say - well - Isaiah lived 600 years before Jesus – how could he see Him? Don't forget that special mountain in the north of Galilee when Jesus stood between Isaiah and Moses – the Mount of Transfiguration – where he did indeed see Jesus in His glory.

The Apostle Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians about the mystery of God's wisdom: *"a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."* (1 Corinthians 2:7-9)

I usually begin most times before a sermon by praying for the Lord to open our eyes, our ears, our hearts, and our minds. Give your senses to God so that He may allow you to see His majesty, His miracles, and His love for you.

Jesus Christ came into the world and disturbed the peace in the world – but even though unrecognized by many – His impact has reverberated through the past two thousand years, and it will continue until He returns in glory. Jesus urged the people of Israel, just as He urges the world today, to understand the importance of the present time and make that very important personal decision. The choice is up to each one of us - to do what is right – and to be reconciled to Almighty God – on His terms before it is too late!