

“Ready for an adventure?” Luke 12:49-56

“I came to cast fire on the earth and would that it was already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, 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.”

He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so, it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

“Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.” Did Jesus really say this? It doesn’t sound like Him. Some may question: “Maybe some of the eyewitnesses that Luke interviewed, got it wrong?” What do you think? And if He did, how does this saying make you feel?

These challenging words of Jesus help us to expose some of those wrong assumptions that many Christians hold to be true. Let’s reflect, **first**, what picture of the Church is widespread among Christians, especially in the West? **Second**, what picture Jesus is painting with these harsh words? **Third**, why is Jesus making it so difficult for us?

First, what picture of the Church is widespread among Christians? What is the Church about? How would you answer? Interestingly, Christians today often have similar ideas and hopes as Jesus’ audience back then. They were hoping that Jesus will bring them peace and comfort and a life where everything will be fine and nothing will be left to worry about. Isn’t this what we all long for?

On the one hand, sure, nothing wrong with those hopes. However, if that is what we hope for and how we understand what the Church is and why she is here, then we will gladly embrace the picture where the Church is mainly about this community of friendly and supportive people, who want to live in peace and care for one another. Nice!

Isn’t that a heart-warming picture? But if that is what defines the Church of Christ, then - how are we different from any other community? Isn’t that what every community is after? Religious and non-religious alike? Could it be that the desire for peace and comfort doesn’t have that much to do with what the Church is about? Could it be that the Church’s main mission is something entirely different? Could it even be that our desire for earthly peace and comfy life hinders us from the main mission why we are here?

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Let's ask our second question – **what picture is Jesus painting with these harsh words?** What is He teaching about His Church? Now, who was Jesus and why did He come? How do we confess? "The only begotten Son of God... God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, **who for us and for our salvation** came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate." **"For us and for our salvation!" Yes!**

Jesus' mission wasn't a sightseeing tour. "Come and experience the beauty of the earth!" It was a military operation, a battle, a rescue mission, which involved violent and bloody confrontation with our ultimate enemies, with sin and death and devil.

Deadly confrontation. Jesus came to free us from the captivity of sin, to pull us out of the jaws of death, to save us from eternal destruction, to liberate us from the deceptive spell of the father of lies, the devil. That was Jesus' mission.

He succeeded; the enemy was defeated. The war was won, but local battles will continue to rage till the end of this age, until the day Jesus comes once again, this time in His divine glory to bring forth His New Creation, New Heavens and New Earth.

But in the meantime, He left His body, the Church, to continue His mission. Now Jesus is sending us **"to open people's eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith."** (Acts 26:18)

How about this picture? This is not about our peace and comfort being the highest goal, where we expect our God to take care of our wants. Just think about the fate of all the apostles, the hostility they encountered, the deaths they died.

Following Jesus seems to be more about us being called out of our comfort zones, being forced to reconsider our priorities, dying to ourselves, being involved in this cosmic rescue mission which involves confrontation with forces of darkness.

Surely, we may prefer the first picture, the cozy, relaxed, friendly, no worries, easy going Christianity – that false, weak and dying deformation of the true Church – but here Jesus calls us to something very different.

Here the Triune God invades your life, He rescues you from the bondage to darkness and death, He sacrifices Himself fully, He redeems you, He gives you a new life and now He expects your absolute loyalty, commitment and obedience.

He invites you to share His journey, the greatest and most dangerous adventure that there is, the greatest rescue operation in the history of the Universe. Forget about your comfort and about your peace, forget about your preferences and about your desires. There is something infinitely greater going on, and you can be part of it.

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If we love anyone or anything more than Jesus, we are not fit for His mission. If we value our comfort and superficial peace in our relationships more than Jesus, we are not fit for His mission.

But if we truly believe what we say we believe as Christians, then what is our greatest treasure, our greatest hope, what is that one thing we fear to lose more than anything? Yes, eternal life with our God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

What then will we strive for with all our heart? To keep the faith, to fear, love and trust our Triune God, to please Him, to honour Him. And what is then the greatest gift that we can give to people in our lives?

Yes, the gift of eternal life, which we can deliver them by telling them about Jesus Christ. What then is the most loving thing we can do for others? To speak to them the pure Gospel, the life-creating words of eternal life.

If we understand this, then we care for the Gospel, we gladly and courageously stand against all false teachings, even if it costs us our peace. If we truly believe what we say we believe, these are our highest priorities, these are our ultimate allegiances.

Our God, eternal life, Jesus' rescue mission and the pure teaching of the Gospel which brings this new life. Everything else, including our peace and comfort, are far less important. And you know this is true from your own experience.

We gladly sacrifice something we believe to be less important, so that we can enjoy what is more important. For example, if our peace and comfort are our priorities, then we won't worry about the truth of the Gospel, or our faithfulness to God, or our participation in His mission. Why bother! For they do bring divisions.

So, yes, Jesus paints for us a very different picture of His Church than the one Christians are often used to – a much more dynamic, much more demanding, much more adventurous vision, where we are called to follow Him and to deny ourselves.

Thus, we come to our final question – Lord Jesus, **why are you making this so difficult for us?** For it may seem so difficult. All the commitment, stepping out of comfort zones, enduring tensions and divisions. The truth is... Jesus is not making it difficult for us. No!

This is why. Two things. First, think about our ultimate allegiance. We are to fear, love and trust our God above all things. Just consider, if there is someone whom you love more than anything, what would you be willing to do for them? Yes, anything!

You meet your spouse, and you happily give up your time with your family because you want to spend every minute with your love. When a baby is born, a loving mother happily gives up her time with friends or hobbies, just to spend more time with that precious little being.

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Would you consider it as a toil or sacrifice if you are invited to go on adventure with the love of your life, with the most precious person in your life? Or would you consider it a privilege and joy, a fulfilment of your dreams?

This is how Jesus approached His mission. There was a cup of God's wrath to be poured upon the fallen and corrupt humanity. The fire from heaven was aimed and launched to destroy everything sinful. Everyone sinful.

But then... Jesus chose to stand in its way. To stand in our place. That fire, meant for me and you, fell upon Jesus on the cross. He feared what was to come, He knew what the cost of this baptism on the cross would be, He desperately wanted it to be over.

Still, there was no doubt in His mind about committing to His mission. He did it for someone whom He loved more than Himself, He did it for the love of His life, for His beloved Bride, the Church, He did it for you. Even as we were still His enemies.

That was difficult. That was unpleasant. Not what He invites us to do. We don't need to suffer what Jesus suffered. We are simply to receive the fruits of His labour and tell everyone about this amazing God, who has done all of this. For us. And for them.

Now the second reason why ours is not a burdensome task. Yes, Jesus says that if we are loyal to Him, that may bring divisions even in our families, even with those who are the closest to us according to flesh. We know that is true.

However, even if we may experience divisions in our families, and some relationships may be completely lost, there is something you need to remember. When the Triune God calls you, He brings you into His family and He gives you amazing Christian friends.

Countless multitudes of them. He gives you a new family, of whom you didn't even know. But, yes, we share the same Father who is in heaven. We share the same brother, Jesus Christ. You are united with this new family, with countless people around the world and across the time, with the most intimate bond, by the Holy Spirit of God indwelling in you.

There are so many who are overjoyed to embrace you, to care for you, to pray for you, because of this deepest bond. You share with your new siblings the most important things. You are loved by the same God, you are called to participate in the same grand adventure, you experience the same joy of the Gospel, you are passionate for everyone to get to know this God.

And the truth to be told, you have peace. Not a worldly peace, but the peace that the world can't give us. The peace that surpasses all our understanding, the peace that comes from Jesus' presence with you, the peace that is a foretaste for what is to come.

So, yes, may our good Lord help us to get the correct picture of what His Church is about and what an amazing privilege it is to be a part of the body of Christ, the beloved Bride of Jesus Christ, and that is what is given to you. Rejoice! Amen.