

Harsh Words of Jesus

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In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus shared some rather harsh words. Harsh because we don't expect them to come from Jesus. While we've come to understand that Jesus shared some harsh words to His critics when He called them "vipers," "hypocrites," and "liars" especially to the scribes and pharisees who were continually giving Him a hard time.

Today, we hear Him share with his disciples and all those listening to Him that He came to cast fire on the earth and wished that it was already started. Words that don't seem to come from the Jesus that we've come to know and love. The One, at whose birth the angels said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (Luke 2:14)

Even old Simeon, after seeing Him in the Temple, once said, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentile, and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:29-32)

After hearing Jesus say these things, we might wonder if the disciples were right in trying to keep the little children away from Him. Why would He say these things? As Christians, we'd expect almost anything but those words that we heard this morning. Words that at the very least would be more appealing to those heard Him. Words more congruent with the love that God has for all people. That more people would be gathered together in His love, and His Kingdom here on this earth might expand. That even unbelievers, would know

that God loves them through words and actions... How can you build a Kingdom or start a mission that's intent on causing discord, division and destruction, intent on casting a fire that would consume this earth? How is this loving? This isn't the Jesus that we heard about in Sunday School.

How can we reconcile this seeming disparity? Well, an easy answer might be that Jesus was sharing His humanity with us. He felt the anxiety and frustration that we all experience from time to time in this world. Whether or not it's an upcoming meeting or deadline at work, an upcoming medical procedure, or simply trying to make sure that everything turns out well. Jesus had reason to be so compassionate in one chapter, and then, seemingly in the next chapter, He overturns the tables of the money exchangers in the Temple. Jesus most certainly experienced all the anxieties and frustrations that we can feel in this world.

But the harder answer for us to understand, is that He's sharing some of His divine nature. His divine nature that can bring God's wrath on His created world. A world that has rejected Him. That would rather worship false gods. That would deny that He even exists. One that often ignores His commands. A created world that wants everything from Him, but gives nothing in return.

As C.S. Lewis once said, "The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about (God) Him. And the conclusion I dread is not 'So there's no God after all,' but rather 'So this is what God's really like.'"

You may already know this but in the days of the westward expansion in our country. When covered wagons made their way across the plains, and when men saw that a prairie fire was coming, it seemed that there was a right way and a wrong way to act. Because often times, there was simply no

way for them to outrun the fire, or at times, guess which way was the safest. Instead, they took a match and burned the grass in the area around them. That way, when encroaching fire came, they didn't have to fear. Because they were standing where a fire had already burned up the ground.

Even though Jesus said, "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49) We don't have to try and reconcile the seemingly two different natures of Jesus. Because Jesus is both the lion and the lamb. He is the Alpha and the Omega. And the Lord knew there was no way of escaping the judgment and division (fire) that would come about. Because of our sins, not only did He experienced the anxiety and frustration that we all experience, but He suffered and died for us. So that we might be saved from the fiery baptism of hell that was meant for us. That we might have *Peace* and be able to take our stand in the only real safe place for us, that is IN HIM.

And that through His resurrection, we too might receive new life IN HIM. Not only does that begin with the words spoken at our baptism, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." But it also continues today, as we live out our baptisms, seeking His forgiveness for all the sins we commit each and every day. Allowing both His Word and Spirit to work in our lives, so that through Him and in Him, we might have a life and peace that the world cannot give to us.

While God wants this for all people, many in this world still believe that the truth is relative. And that even families would be divided over what to make of the incarnate Word of God. Three against two and two against three. Father against son, and son against father. Mother against daughter and daughter against mother. Even mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-

law. And yet, God's word is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, it pierces to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

Today, not only do we pray that we might have peace and remain in Him all the days of our life, but that by His Spirit, through our words and actions, the Good News of the Gospel might be shared with those around us. That His peace might reign in us because we are IN HIM, and that His Kingdom might continue to grow through the lives of those around us. Such that they too might come to believe in the peace, love and grace that God has for them. And together, we might live in Him both now and always.

In Jesus Name, Amen.