Text: Luke 12:49-56

**Introduction**

There is something about our gospel lesson today that often gets it placed in various catalogs of “hard sayings of Jesus/” At the same time Jesus would seem to think our placing it there is ridiculous.

And at least to me, compared to the people Jesus was originally speaking to, the reasons we might have trouble are flip flopped.

I don’t think I do this often, but I think it is worth bringing up a pair of theological words. The first which is the proper work of God and its pair is the alien work of God. The proper work of God can be defined by what we read and heard last week. God’s steadfast love toward his creation. Consider the ravens. You are worth much more than these. It is the proper work of God, the work that he wants to do, to Help, Save, Comfort and Defend his people. It is the proper Word of God that speaks to us of the Gospel. The theologians use proper because this work and word are part of the very nature of God who describes himself as love. But that proper work also spawns something of a shadow – the alien work of God. God’s creatures are not robots. We are not just carrying out our programming. We all have agency. Those are all just ways to say that we can say no. The alien work of God is that work he does which is not in his nature, when we say no to his salvation. When we refuse to hear his word.

**Text**

When Jesus says, “I came to cast fire upon the earth” it is not that he is talking about that alien work alone. What he is talking about is that the Word of God is going to go out and be proclaimed to the entire world. That word of God is the message of the Cross and the resurrection. The baptism he would be baptized with. And the salvation that it accomplished. Christ took our baptism we deserved, that alien work of God to forsake his creation. Jesus took that upon himself, so that he might send out his servants to proclaim his baptism. As Peter would say, “baptism now saves you.” As Mark would record, “all who believe and are baptized will be saved.”

But we have the ability to say no. We can remain in our disbelief. We can deny our baptism.

This is the fire that has been cast upon the earth since Jesus gave the commission to his disciple to make more disciples, baptizing and the teaching. It is rare that that Word proclaimed has been met with peace. “Do you think I have come to give peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.” This is the division of the ages. We tend to thing of that division of the sheep and the goats as happening at the end. But that merely a reflection of what happens here and now. The Word of God is proclaimed. And the division is created. The Word of God does not return empty. It accomplishes that which is goes out for. Whether that is the proper work of God – to gather his sheep into his fold. Or if that is the alien work of God, to hand those who would not be gathered over to the outer darkness, where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

It is exactly this division that Jesus describes. “For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three.” And those divisions will cut the closest relationships we have in this world. Father against son, mother against daughter.

Now this division, something which is and always has been obvious, never-the-less makes all of us mad. Or maybe mad isn’t the right word. It makes all of us uneasy or unwilling to hear it. Now I think the reasons might have flip flopped. Jesus initial audience – the Jews – we unwilling to hear it because of their expectation of the work of the messiah. The messiah was to show up with sword and fire and unleash that alien work of God upon the gentile. The family – the people of God – would not be split because all Israel would be gathered and the gentiles cast down. Jesus coming, and doing the signs of the messiah, but then saying that physical Israel would be split, was too much. That is not what God is supposed to do. They knew better.

I think we are something of the opposite. If a preacher talks today about the alien work of God, many will not believe it. God is a good guy after all. He’s the ultimate softie. The cosmic warm fuzzy. Most of us are something of universalists. Any division language is just scare tactics. Or added later. Or misunderstandings. Or any of the other ways to dismiss Jesus’ relatively common language about destruction. While his original hearers would be made that the God wasn’t destroying the right people fast enough. We get mad that God says he will respect our will…our agency. And that if we wish to reject his proper work, he will carry out that alien work.

But either way, Jesus to be seems to be telling us to stop letting our unease at this Word get in the way of receiving it. “You hypocrits, you know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

**Christology**

If we recognize the time we should recognize that the only call of the time is to proclaim the gospel. What Jesus commissioned us to do is make disciples, baptizing and teaching. What Jesus has done is poured out his Spirit with power that his word might be heard. He is a God who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. As long as there is breath, it is the day of grace. Right up until the 11th hour as the parable would say.

Now the patterns of a life are hard to change. If it were up to us we would never change. But the Word of God has its power. This I the same word that brough the entire cosmos into existence. It is the same word that called Lazarus out of the tomb. It is the same Word that throughout time has done signs and wonders. And God wishes to do his proper work – to save sinners. He does this though his word of peace shared by you and me.

**Moral**

The facts of division are not an excuse to stop sharing. Likewise the facts of division are not an excuse for we ourselves to turn our backs on Christ. And it is that sad state of things that often happens that I believe Jesus’ words are aimed at. The divisions created by the proclamation of the gospel will go right at our deepest human relationships. Our enemy the devil is constantly looking for those fissures. The world is constantly offering the people of God what it thinks might be a better deal. It is your holding on to Christ that is causing all this animosity. Turn away and there will be peace. Like the court prophets of Jeremiah to those who despised the Word of the Lord, “It will be well with you” when you give up that word. “No disaster shall come upon you.”

But that very division is often the sign of the Word of God working.

**Eschatological**

Did you think this would be easy? Did you think the way to eternal life would be the garden path? Jesus bids us pick up our cross. He calls it the narrow way.

But it is the way to life. It is the way of the proper work of God. The work that helps, saves, comforts and defends. It is the way to peace on earth. Not this earth. No, on this earth there will be division. The division of the ages. But that peace is the foundation of the new heavens and the new earth. On that day, all idols shall perish and Satan’s lying cease. And Christ will raise his scepter decreeing endless peace.

Today, the Kingdom comes by division, because we have to be moved from Satan’s kingdom to Christs. Tomorrow, that alien work will be finished.