

“Division of the House”

Sundays after Pentecost

Luke 12:51

August 15, 2010

God is relentless in His pursuit to bring us into the kingdom. To the degree that humankind rebels – God pursues. This is not unlike the physics principle – to every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” I am reminded of God’s persistence through the stubbornness we display.

When I see people argue, to the degree that one tries to make a point, to convince the other of being right, the other responds with equal determination. When the mood fits, we too become relentless in our quest to convince others of their errors. Case in point is the continuing struggle we see regarding border issues and the economy.

When in life we assume a position of stubbornness, when we fight against acknowledging when wrong, God responds accordingly. God will not give up fighting for us, and as is often the case, fighting with us. A look over human history bears this out. Humankind has been in a constant rebellion against God.

With each passing generation rebellion against God continues. Each generation has seemingly moved farther away from God. It appears as if we have become more tolerant of sin and sinful behavior. We rationalize our existence. We excuse our arrogance. We justify ourselves with the excuse “If everyone else is doing it then it can’t be wrong.” Humanity, through sin, has lost its way. To find our way back we must become severed from the old ways, drowning our desires, and learn to step out into a new direction. Doing so means walking away from existing relationships. It means letting go of old living patterns and adopting new ones. This is always difficult, painful, and unsettling.

Jesus came to accomplish this very thing. Jesus came to save us from ourselves, from our old lifestyle that could literally destroy our lives. Jesus seeks to disrupt our old ways, making it clear that we are to love one another across the chasms of our diversity. God loves us this way and seeks to help us to love one another in this way too. To do so we must be separated from that which keeps us from God.

At the beginning of Luke’s Gospel is the Christmas story. Luke records that the angels sang “and on earth peace....” They could have sung with equal truth and passion “and on earth division.” The Holy Spirit gave Simeon an understanding of who this child of Mary and Joseph was. He responds by saying “Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace,” but to Mary the message “A sword will pierce through your own soul also.” Luke writes about the baby, “This child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel.” Jesus brings division: “From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three.” Within those relationships and within that span of generation, there will be division of the house.

Because Jesus’ words and life were constant accusations against the selfishness of the people, Jesus was “cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of his people.” Jesus would endure the cross and die that we might be brought back into God’s kingdom.

The Christmas hymn reads, “The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head....” Maybe then. But uneasy lies the head that does God’s will. Here the head of the Church announces that he has come to cast fire upon the earth. The Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism; and led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

Jesus knew the baptism he would have to undergo that we might have life and have it abundantly. John the Baptist would announce that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. First Jesus would undergo his own dreadful suffering and death. Then he would cast fire upon the earth, a fire to separate out the lie from the truth.

Uneasy our heads too, upon whom the Spirit has come. We cannot take our ease, relaxed in the house of the Lord. Jesus calls for division of the house. It is among this house, the household of faith that division will be made. It was among those who claimed to be servants of God that these cutting words will be spoken. We who perceive ourselves as members of the household of God must be alert to the call for division. The issue is Jesus Christ, and the decision that confronts us calls us to honor God as we honor Jesus, and we do that by doing for the least of his brothers what we are ready to do for him.

Division of the house - God calls and pursues us to separate from that which takes us away from him (i.e. the rich young ruler). Division of the house - God wields his Word, sharper than a two-edged sword that our lives, our souls may be saved. The stakes are high – our very being is at stake. No price is too high. God, who was willing to sacrifice his Son certainly will not think it too high a price if our salvation causes division of the house.

Division of the house – becoming separated from that which opposes God's will. It is unsettling and uncomfortable and even uncompromising. It will lead to misunderstandings by those who are outside of the influence of God. It certainly will humble our spirits. When we separate, we do so knowing how we desire not our will, not our needs, and not our wants, but we desire to do God's will.

Life in Christ calls for the division of the house.

AMEN