

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: August 8 – 14, 2016

Lectionary Readings: Jeremiah 23:23–29, Psalm 82, Hebrews 11:29—12:2, Luke 12:49–56

Prayer of the Day: *O God, judge eternal, you love justice and hate oppression, and you call us to share your zeal for truth. Give us courage to take our stand with all victims of bloodshed and greed, and, following your servants and prophets, to look to the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen*

This week's references come from the following sources. The appropriate resource will be referenced at the end of an entry by using the letters preceding each resource listed here.

- BPS: Brian P. Stoffregen's commentary notes (Pr, Faith Luth, Yuma AZ) Crossmarks.com/brian
- DT: David L. Tiede, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: Luke*
- JS: John Shea, *The Relentless Widow (Luke)*
- L: Lectionary.com
- LTJ: Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sacra Pagina: the Gospel of Luke*
- NISB: *New Interpreter's Study Bible*"
- SB: *Serendipity Bible for Groups* (NIV version)
- SPMc: Stephen P. McCutchan, *Water from the Rock, Lectionary Devotional for Cycle C*
- WP: WorkingPreacher.org (Luther Seminary)
 - David Lose (2010), *Preaching Chair*, Luther Seminary
 - David Lose (2013), *Dear Working Preacher*, now President of Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia
 - Emerson Powery (2013), Professor of Biblical Studies, Messiah College, PA
 - Erick J. Thompson (2016), Senior Pastor, Holy Trinity Lutheran, New Prague, MN

Background information on this text:

- "Our Gospel lesson is set in the middle of a larger section (12:35 – 13-9) that emphasizes watchfulness, readiness, and faithful discipleship." (L)
- "... This is one of those weeks when the Gospel reading make you want to turn to one of the other texts appointed for this Sunday. It is harsh, more than a little threatening and rather uncomfortable to hear. But here's the question: Is that the passage's fault or ours?
... biblical texts always involve bridging the distinct contexts of the biblical story and today's world, and some weeks the chasm between those two is both deep and wide. This week is a good example. By and large, we avoid conflict and division in our congregations at all costs, yet here Jesus is talking about bringing just that. We want peace and moreover call Jesus the prince of peace, yet just now Jesus says that's not what he came to bring. We are, by and large, focused on the present or at least certainly not looking for the end of the world, and yet in this passage Jesus seems to look to the future and it is, to say the least, foreboding.

Do you see what I mean? We are firmly rooted in a world that seems so different than the one Jesus lives in that it makes it hard for us to relate and even, perhaps, to hear. And that's what's challenging about today's passage: when we read it primarily in light of our context it seems remarkably out of place. But looking more closely at the context of the passage itself and suspending our judgments may help us find a way to read and preach it.

I said 'context' but there is more than one. The first is the narrative context. At this point in the story, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, where the conflicts he has been experiencing will boil over into a plot to take his life. And Jesus knows this. He knows, that is, that he will soon be baptized not by water but by the fire kindled with nails and wood, and just now he feels the weight and pressure of what is to come. He is, to use a word with which we are very familiar, *stressed*, stretched to the point of breaking.

. . . Stress is one of the watchwords of our age, as we also often feel pulled by schedules and responsibilities and pressures beyond what we can endure. And Jesus knows this. We confess that God became human in Jesus precisely to know and redeem our condition. Might the Jesus who is stressed by what is to come have something to say to Christians today? No, we are not facing crucifixion. But many of us are facing terminal illness, or a loss of job or wages, or deep loneliness, or mental illness, or ... the list goes on. We at times feel pulled beyond what we can endure and Jesus has been there.

The other context is historical. Luke writes of these events about forty years after they've happened, and with all the Gospel writers he shapes his account to address the situation and questions of his community. And so we can guess with some confidence that the division Jesus speaks of has manifested itself in spades in Christian communities by the time Luke writes." (Lose, Dear WP)

- "With all of the divisiveness present in society these days, it seems like the last thing we need is a gospel text that seemingly encourages more division.

On the face of it, Jesus calls for or predicts that very thing. Yet, as we dive into this text, there are certainly other interpretations available. Situated inside the entire section, there is ample evidence to suggest that Jesus is setting the stage for the eventual outcome of his ministry and what that means for those who follow him.

This particular section can be looked at as having three different parts. The first is a quick summary of his ministry and its eventual end; a fire of cleansing judgment that spreads the good news and the baptism of his death in order to conquer death. Following this is a discussion of the effects the gospel might have on anyone who follows him, and finally, a warning from Jesus about our willingness to hear and see only what we want to." (Thompson, WP)

- **"The Time of Judgment (12:49-59).** These last verses in the chapter are Luke's gathering of Jesus' words of judgment. There is no relief, nor is there any response from Peter or the multitudes or Jesus' adversaries throughout this section. The force of each set of sayings is compounded by this context. Whether Jesus is speaking 'to us or to all' (v. 41), he is revealing that the 'will and plan' of God is at work in him as a driving power which wreaks division among people (vv. 49-53). People would do well to catch on, to observe what is happening before their very eyes (vv. 54-56), and they should be instructed that divine judgment will not be delayed (vv. 57-59)." (DT, 243)
- "Luke reworks traditions he has inherited as well as he draws upon his own sources to produce a story of Jesus that makes sense of his community's present experience. The realities and concerns that occupy his community -- issues of wealth and poverty, the delay of Jesus' return, concerns about the orderly transition of apostolic authority, and more -- therefore influence how Luke thinks about and writes the history of Jesus. History -- *all* history, including gospel history -- is written backwards, shaped by the concrete circumstances and realities of the historian and his or her community.

... As interesting as the historical context and background of the biblical text may be, the more pressing question is not the past of the text but its future. What, that is, might this text say to us about our life in faith and in the world? How will this passage shape our view of God, ourselves, and our neighbor? How will this passage affect us? What will it do to us? History is written backwards; sermons forward.

... Given the repeated shifts in audience between the disciples and the crowds throughout this section of Luke's narrative (in today's pericope the disciples are addressed in verses 49-53, the crowds in verses 54-56) it is likely we have multiple distinct recollections of Jesus' ministry spliced together. Their relation to each other is, therefore, sometimes hard to detect and may at times feel a bit forced. Similarly, Jesus' comments seem to slide between references to his immediate mission and fate and a more distant eschatological reality. Further, his message about bringing division rather than peace will strike most listeners ... as at least counter-intuitive, if not downright contradictory to much of his preaching.

In order both to detect the theological confession (or confessions) rooted in Luke's narrative and to anticipate what effects they may produce in the congregation, I suggest that we give first attention to Jesus' description of his mission. It unfolds through three related purpose statements or activities. Jesus came to bring fire, to be baptized, and to bring division." (David Lose, WP)

Day 1

Luke 12:49-56

⁴⁹"I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵²From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³they 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."

⁵⁴He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. ⁵⁵And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. ⁵⁶You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

Read through the entire Gospel lesson:

- We invite you to continue journaling as a part of your devotional/meditative time.
- Jot down any words or phrases that stand out to you.
- What do you think God might be saying in this story? Record this in your journal.

Day 2

Luke 12:49-50

⁴⁹"I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!"

Background:

- 12:49-50 "Jesus accentuates his teaching on possessions and faithful service by spelling out further his understanding of *the times*. The presence of God's saving dominion in Jesus' own person and ministry marks an epochal shift, with persons confronted with the need to embrace the new age or cling to the old. The resulting division was predicted by John the Baptist (3:17) and is characteristic of Jesus' ministry (vv. 49-53) at the same time that it presages the coming end-time judgment (vv. 54-59)." (NISB, 1879-1880)
- 12:49-50 "In these verses Luke offers a rare glimpse into Jesus' own sense of urgency of his mission...The theme is still the 'will of God' (... Gk: *thelēma*), but now it is Jesus as the agent of God's will...Jesus is not merely 'wishing' that something might happen. He is caught up in God's will and plan as announced before by John that the Messiah would baptize 'with the Holy Spirit and with fire ...to gather the wheat ... and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.' (3:16-17). No aspect of the Messiah's mission will fail of fulfillment including the **baptism** and the **fire**, but how it shall be **accomplished [completed]** is still hidden in the will of God. Perhaps even Jesus does not yet know how all of this will take place.

The Christian reader may be tempted to diminish the theme of judgment and peril. After all, the baptism of fire will prove to be fulfilled in the fiery baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the fulfillment of the promise of the Father (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4; 2:1-4). But Jesus is the bearer of the prophetic word, and the 'constraint' and 'determination' he feels are that of the will of God." (DT, 243)

- "This is an impassioned outburst, the eruption of Jesus' heart that divulges what drives him. He understands himself as a man on a mission, and he is impatient for it to be accomplished ... The fire in Jesus is also from God, but he is not a reluctant prophet trying to control it. He is the eager Son looking ahead to the blaze of accomplishment." (JS, 227)
- 12:49-50 "Jesus now speaks of the **fire** of his word and the **baptism** that **constrains** him. He is interpreting his own mission in sharply prophetic terms, and the peril of judgment is deeply felt. Neither Jesus' contemporaries nor the Christian reader should be deluded. Even God's will to save and to fulfill the promises confronts and exposes resistance and rejection and provokes deep divisions." (DT. 244)
 - "This image, 'casting fire on the earth' [**bring fire to earth**], is closely connected with the experience of the Spirit. John the Baptist has predicted that the one who is to come will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16). In the Acts of the Apostles the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the gathering of the disciples is symbolized as tongues of fire (Acts 2:1-4). This suggests that their speech will be the way the fire of the Holy Spirit will spread upon the earth. Therefore, in the deepest sense, the casting of fire means releasing the Spirit, purifying people even as it empowers them." (JS, 227)
 - "At least with the first two images, fire and baptism, Jesus' is distressed that he hasn't **completed** these tasks. By placing this saying in the midst of the journey narrative -- Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem but not there, yet -- Luke may be indicating that the completion of these tasks takes place on the cross in Jerusalem when he is 'immersed' into death, or, in a broader sense, his immersion into the passion/suffering events that take place in Jerusalem." (BPS)
 - "The images of **baptism** and **fire** were given early in Luke as part of Jesus' 'marching orders,' 'He will **baptize** you with the Holy Spirit and **fire**' (Luke 3:16). However, the baptism referred to in our verses is applied to Jesus himself, not to anyone else." (BPS)
 - ". . . the fire of judgement is perhaps about our own (in)ability to save ourselves. The cleansing fire reveals that we need God." (Thompson, WP)
- 12:49 What is the **fire** Jesus comes to cast? Some possibilities from Luke/Acts:
 - **purification = removing the bad (repentance?) from the good**
the unfruitful trees from the fruitful (Lk 3:9)
the chaff from the wheat (Lk 3:17)
(see also Jer 6:29; Zeph 13:9; Mal 3:2)
 - **judgment = total destruction**
by James and John against Samaritans (Lk 9:54)
by God on Sodom (Lk 17:29; Gn 19:24)
 - **the presence of God -- not necessarily unpleasant**
Jesus, who baptizes with Holy Spirit and fire (Lk 3:16)
the Holy Spirit as tongues of fire (Ac 2:3)
the angel in the burning bush (Ac 7:30; Ex 3:2)
 - **a sign of the last days (Ac 2:19; Jl 2:28-32; 2 Pet 3:12)**
 - **a source of warmth and light on a cold, dark night (Lk 22:55; Ac 28:2)**
this could present some interesting images: Peter, in order to benefit from the fire, would have to sit close to the enemies of his Lord -- the same is true of Paul

Other possibilities:

- fire used in sacrifices (Ex 29:14; 29:34, etc.)
- fire used to destroy the idol of the golden calf (Ex 32:20, 24) connected with the Word of God (Is 30:27; Jer 5:14; 23:29 – note that Jer 23:23-29 is the First Lesson for Lutherans; cf. Is 6:6)
- used of 'passion' (Is 26:11; Zeph 1:18; 3:8; cf. 1Cor 7:9)
- Could the fire that Jesus' cast down on earth be his good deeds for sinful humanity rather than a judgmental use of the word?
- We use the phrase 'being on fire' to refer to someone who is passionate about something." (BPS)
- 12:49 **Fire** is a multivalent biblical image. It can represent the presence of God -- think pillar fire in Exodus (13:17-22) and the tongues of flame at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). It can also represent eschatological judgment -- in Revelation, Satan and his army are consumed by fire (20:7-10). Fire also represents purification -- Zachariah (13:9) and Malachi (3:2-3) each refer to God's intention to purify Israel like a refiner purifies silver by fire. We need not necessarily divide sharply between these possibilities to appreciate Jesus' use of this image. Jesus, as Simeon foresaw, not only represents God's prepared salvation (2:30-31), but also 'is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inward thoughts of many will be revealed' (2:34-35). He embodies the presence of God which simultaneously judges and purifies." (David Lose, WP)
 - "The sayings on the fire that Jesus wishes to cast on the earth and the baptism he must undergo are sufficiently obscure as to leave open their precise point of reference; they could refer to the coming judgment of the Son of Man (see 12:40), or to the eschatological gift of the Spirit in fire at Pentecost (Acts 2:3). . . (LTJ, 209)
 - ". . . The image recalls the prophet Elijah who drew down fire from the Lord against the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:36-40) and also on the soldiers of King Ahaziah (2 Kgs 1:10, 12, 14). Jesus' disciples wanted to exercise this sort of retaliation on the Samaritans (9:54) but he did not allow it." (LTJ, 207)
- 12:49b "Jesus knows that the cross will be a terrible experience, and the anticipation is also painful. It would be almost merciful if he could go immediately to the cross so that he could get that terrible experience behind him. More to the point, however, is that the salvation that he has come to bring can be accomplished only through the cross — so he is also anxious to complete the work that he has come to do." (L)
- 12:50 "In order for the Spirit to be released, Jesus has to undergo another **baptism**. In the first baptism the Spirit permeated him and sent him on a mission of forgiveness and reconciliation. This second baptism—his death and resurrection—will bequeath the same Spirit to his disciples and send them on a mission of forgiveness and reconciliation. As important and powerful as Jesus' teaching is, it does not have the revelatory power of his death and resurrection. When the disciples grasp the revelation of Jesus' dying and rising, his fire will pass into them. They will be in the condition of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, their 'hearts burning' within them (Luke 24:32) ... The fire that began with Jesus casting it upon the land of Israel will now blaze throughout all nations.

Therefore, Jesus' anguish takes on a double meaning. His impending death certainly causes him trepidation. He is human, and he is not exempt from the natural fears associated with loss and death. But this distress is taken up and transformed by the more profound concern of fulfilling his mission. His sufferings are part of a divine plan that he is eager to take to the next state." (JS, 228)

 - "*Baptisma* and *baptizo* probably carries the sense of 'immersion, plunged, overwhelmed. Usually this verse is taken to refer to Jesus' passion, I wonder if it couldn't also refer to the whole incarnation, where the eternal Word is **immersed** or **plunged** into human flesh and lives among us. I guess the question is, 'What does **it** refer to in 50b?' What is **it** that being completed?

Usually this Greek word for ‘**completed**’ (*teleo*) is used of ‘completing’ or ‘fulfilling’ a prior written word: the law of the Lord (2:39); the prophets (18:31); scripture (22:37 & Ac 13:29). The verses about fulfilling ‘the prophets’ and ‘scriptures’ seem to refer specifically to Jesus’ passion and death.

It may be that the; ‘plunge’ into humanity is completed with Jesus’ human death. The divine one dies. The immortal one ‘puts on’ mortality.

This image of ‘being plunged’ into suffering and death -- of emptying himself of his godliness -- would seem to be the opposite picture of the powerful God casting fire down on the earth. Perhaps, if ‘fire’ refers to judgment, this happens when our godlessness is revealed to us as we inflicted pain and death on the innocent Son of God.

Whatever ‘fire’ and ‘baptism’ mean, the result of them in these verses is divisions.” (BPS)

- 12:50a **Baptism**: “This reference to baptism can best be understood in the light of Jesus’ response to James and John, who asked to sit at his right and left hand in the kingdom. Jesus said to them, ‘You don’t know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’ (Mark 10:38). The cup and baptism are metaphors for Jesus’ suffering and death. ‘Baptize’ probably retains its original sense of dip, immerse, or plunge, and this is a life-threatening immersion in water or fire’ (Tannehill, 213).” (L)
 - “**Baptism** also is used in the New Testament to represent both judgment and purification and was connected with fire by John (3:16-17). Jesus refers, however, not to the baptism he brings but to the one he receives. In this context, the baptism of which Jesus speaks seems clearly to be an allusion to his cross, an event that dominates every moment of his mission. Strikingly, the One who embodies the presence of God is not simply meting out the fire of judgment and purification, but bears it also himself.” (David Lose, WP)
 - “. . . the baptism of fire that Jesus underwent in his crucifixion he endured so that we might have the promise that wherever we are, Jesus has already been, and where Jesus is now, we shall someday be. Jesus dies, we regularly confess, for our sins, those of both omission and commission. And the promise of the gospel is that there is nothing we can do to lose that forgiveness or the larger inheritance of abundant life that Jesus won.” (Lose, Dear WP)
- 12:50b **Stress**: “The term ‘stress’ is from the Greek verb (*syn-echo*), and may also be translated as ‘distressed.’ It has the meaning of ‘holding together,’ ‘holding tightly’ or ‘squeezing.’ In Luke’s Gospel it is associated with ‘sickness,’ like ‘holding on to a fever’ (cf. 4:38), or, stressful situations, like holding on to fear (cf. 8:37). Or, sometimes Luke uses the term to describe crowds or enemies ‘pressing in’ on others (cf. 8:45; 19:43; 22:63). Only Luke uses this term to describe how Jesus is feeling. ... Furthermore, Jesus recognizes how this stress is causing a shift in his own mission.” (Powery, WP)
- 12:50b **Until it is completed**: “These are the words of a man committed to a difficult mission but distressed at the anticipation of it — wishing that the waiting was over and the mission completed. It is the kind of feeling that a soldier has when entering battle — that a police officer has while racing toward a crime scene — that a candidate for surgery feels while waiting for the time to come. We expect the trial to be bad, but the waiting is difficult too. We will see Jesus’ distress again as he prays on the Mount of Olives, his sweat becoming ‘like great drops of blood falling down on the ground’ (22:44).” (L)
- 12:50 “Paralleling the notion of judgment in these verses is the significance of Jesus’ remarks as a purposeful mission statement. This is evident, first, simply from his use of the phrase, ‘I came to ...’ The whole of v. 50—with its three elements: **baptism + being consumed + completion**—should be understood along these lines as well. That is, Jesus’ reference to ‘**baptism**’ might serve less as a metaphor for judgment and more as a

reference to this event in his own life, since Luke presents Jesus' baptism, in part, as an episode of commissioning. It would be this divine mandate that consumes Jesus or drives him forward. Again, the choice of the verb, 'to **complete**,' conveys the idea that Jesus is concerned in this co-text to stress the divine nature of his charge. Judgment, from this perspective, is not a surprising consequence of his ministry and is not a contradiction of his mission; rather, it is integral to it. He had come as God's representative to bring **division**, so the dissolution of family bonds (which, in the Lukan narrative, has as its consequence the formation of a new kinship group around Jesus) should be taken as confirmation that he is God's agent and that he is bringing to fruition the purpose of God." (JG, 509-510)

Reflection Question:

- How do you understand this "fire" and "baptism" that Jesus is talking about in verses 49 and 50? How might these words of Jesus relate to your life?

Day 3

Luke 12: 51-53

⁵¹Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!

⁵²From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³they 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."

Background:

- 12:51-53 "Every kind of **division** is envisioned, especially the kind which penetrates to the household. No doubt such divisions were very real in the households of Israel where the early Christian mission found a hearing. No easy **peace** was possible there, perhaps especially after Israel's terrible calamities at the hands of the Romans made toleration of diversity within the family of Israel less possible. Of course, Luke proclaims Jesus as God's act of peace for the earth ... but when rejected, Jesus will bring destruction rather than peace (see 19:41-44). The two-edged sword of the word and mission of God which Jesus bears will cut Israel to the quick. Those who would reduce Jesus to a sentimental savior of a doting God have not come to terms with the depth of divine passion, of the wrath and love of God which is revealed in Jesus' word, will, and obedience even unto death." (DT, 244)
 - ". . . the precise point of the prophetic challenge is to divide the people. Here the programmatic prophecy of Simeon in 2:35 is given its explicit fulfillment in the mouth of the prophet himself: he divides households and creates a division in the people." (TLJ, 2090)
 - "The overall portrait of Jesus suggests a nonviolent man, walking the way of peace and reconciliation. **Here, however, this text does not focus on the teaching of Jesus but on its effects.** Some people accept the teaching and follow Jesus. Other people reject the teaching and walk away. As people decide, they divide. Jesus' offer of peace and reconciliation leads to inevitable division. Therefore, he casts fire on the earth in a second way. This is not the fire of the Spirit, but the fire of judgment. It is the fire that purifies..." (JS, 229)
 - "Jesus lets those gathered know that following him will not be easy, particularly because the gospel will not always bring peace. Families were being torn apart when the gospel spread because it changed everything. Given our contexts, this may not always happen, but there certainly could be some disagreement or strife in families as the nature of the call is worked out and understood. . . The problem may not lie in the

division itself, but in how we respond to the divisions that happen in our lives.” (Thompson, WP)

- 12:52-53 “These severed blood and marriage bonds used to be the primary human loyalties. But now they must take second place to the loyalty accorded to Jesus. The revelation of God in Jesus makes an absolute claim on people, and any claims that compete with it must be abandoned ... Jesus’ forthright admission of the divisive effect of his presence and message on family life is part of his unflinching approach. He never soft-pedals what is involved in following him. He makes clear the consequences of commitment.” (JS, 229)
- 12:51 “What is the ‘**peace**’ that Jesus doesn’t bring?: I think that in the first century, this was understood literally. Following Jesus, often meant divisions in families. This has also happened in our centuries ... One’s beliefs can bring separation from family members.” (BPS)
 - “‘Do you think I have come to bring peace?’ underscores Jesus’ awareness that the presence of division and judgment will, for many, stand in stark contrast to what might have been expected of the divine intervention. Indeed, it seems to stand in tension with the Lukan representation of Jesus’ own mission.” (JG, 510)
 - “This is a disturbing word! We prefer to remember Jesus as the Prince of Peace who comes ‘to guide our feet into the way of peace’ (1:79) and to dispense peace and ‘good will toward men’ (2:14).” (L)
 - “As this passage suggests, the opposite of peace, in Jesus’ teaching, is not ‘war’ but ‘division’ (*diameriosmos*). And, this division is of a specific kind: Jesus’ coming has created much conflict within families, synagogues, and the larger public arena. Certainly, by the author’s time (a couple of generations after Jesus’ death), he has experienced or heard about the break-up of close-knit networks. Even these divisions, however, are ominous sounding since divided houses usually do not survive (cf. 11:17-18).” (Powery, WP)
 - “. . . More surprising is the apparent contradiction of the infancy account’s promise that Jesus would bring peace (1:79; 2:14, 29). The answer, of course, is that those who accept the prophet have this peace (7:50; 8:48; 10:1-6) . . .” (TLJ, 208)
- 12:51 “The **division** of which Jesus speaks is a result of the purifying fire he bears. The kingdom of God he proclaims represents a new order governed not by might but by forgiveness (hence the import of forgiveness in the Lord’s prayer, 11:4), not by fear but by courage (‘be not afraid’ in 1:13, 30, 2:10, 5:11, 8:50, 12:4, 7, 32), and not by power but by humility (see Mary’s song, 1:46-55). Yet those invested in the present order; those lured by the temptations of wealth, status, and power; and those who rule now will resist this coming kingdom for it spells an end to what they know and love (or at least have grown accustomed to). Hence Jesus -- though coming to establish a rule of peace -- brings division, even to the most intimate and honored of relationships, that among family.” (David Lose, WP)
 - “For testimony that judgment has already begun, Jesus turns to the motif of **division**, highlighting its importance through repetition of the term. Borrowing language from Mic 7:6, Jesus applies this image of the division of loyalties within families to the context of his ministry. As his present discourse, begun in 12:1, has already made clear, a decision to adopt his canons of faithfulness to God would require a deeply rooted and pervasive transformation of how one understands God and how one understands the transformation of the world purposed by this God. This would involve Jesus’ disciples in dispositions and forms of behavior that could only be regarded as deviant within their kin groups ... he maintains that his ministry has as one of its consequences the deconstruction of conventional family bonds.” (JG, 509)
- 12:52 “Even families will be divided because of Jesus. In Israel’s life, family relationships are all important. A person’s place in the family confers both personal identity and a place in the community. People know who you are, because they know your father and mother (4:22). The family also provides a support system in a world without public welfare programs. To

divide a family is to leave its members on shaky ground socially and economically. It is hacking at the very roots of the social structure.” (L)

- 12:53 “The same Greek words for ‘son,’ ‘father,’ ‘daughter,’ ‘mother,’ ‘daughter-in-law,’ and ‘mother-in-law’ are used in the LXX of Micah 7:6, with similar disintegrating relationships. Thus Luke is indicating that Jesus is fulfilling another prophetic utterance with the destruction of family relationships. Yet, in stark contrast, Luke 1:17 seems to make reference to Malachi 4:6: ‘He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse’.

The result of Jesus' coming both turns family members towards each other and it turns them against each other. Examples of both reactions can be found in contemporary society.

The word for ‘divide’ is used of what the soldiers did with Jesus' clothing (23:34) -- each piece was taken by a different owner. Jesus also said that a kingdom divided against itself will become a desert (11:17). Perhaps what divides the families is not Jesus himself, but his demand for total allegiance to his cause. His kingdom -- his people -- cannot be divided. It is not a question of ‘both/and,’ but ‘either/or.’ (BPS)

- “*father . . . against son*: Most remarkable here is the reversal of the promise made concerning the mission of John by Gabriel, that like Elijah, he would ‘furn the hearts of fathers to their children. (1:17).” (TLJ, 208)

Reflection Questions:

- David Lose asks: “How, then, do we hear Jesus' pronouncement that he brings fire and division rather than peace? ... What elements of our lives hinder our service to the God of the lowly and powerless?” Do we see these elements being consumed by the fire Jesus brings? How?
- Have you experienced these words of Jesus in your family life? If yes, how?

Day 4

Luke 12:54-56

⁵⁴He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain’; and so it happens. ⁵⁵And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. ⁵⁶You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

Background:

- 12:54-56 “These words are often read as a general comment on ‘interpreting the times,’ but their intensity is compounded by the context as well as by the sharp charge against **you hypocrites** ... there is nothing cool or dispassionate here, only an indictment which draws upon the observations of common intelligence. People are clever enough to anticipate the weather by watching the clouds and the winds. Such ‘discernment’ of the face of earth and heaven is known to them, but they do not know how to ‘discern this present moment’ (Gk: *kairos*).” (DT, 244-245)
- 12:54-55 “The illustration seems to point to the weather patterns in the Near East. The Mediterranean Sea was to the west and winds from that direction brought rain. The desert was to the south and winds from that direction brought heat.” (BPS)
 - “Farmers and shepherds know how to read such signs. Such knowledge is key to their survival.” (L)
- 12:54 “Explicit mention of the **crowds** [v. 54] recalls their presence throughout this discourse, but in this case it may also serve to recall for us Jesus' characterization of the crowds as sign-seekers (11:14-16,29). In that earlier co-text he had castigated the crowds for their

inability to recognize the signs already in front of them, and the purpose of his present words to them is not much different.” (JG, 511)

- “It is worth mentioning that, though Jesus has specifically turned his attention to the **crowds** at this point, the disciples are not completely out of view. It is the crowds whose actions have evoked the appellation ‘hypocrites,’ but this does not insinuate that the disciples are immune from this contagion. Jesus had begun this discourse by admonishing the disciples to beware of the contaminant known as hypocrisy (v. 1); the crowds heard this warning too, but have nonetheless been caught up in it. How the disciples will fare remains to be seen.” (JG, 512)
- 12:56 “Key to his message is the label he gives the crowds, ‘**hypocrites.**’ The usage of this term here corroborates our earlier view that, in the world of Luke, ‘hypocrite’ does not refer to someone who simply plays a role ... Jesus plainly regards the crowds not as deceivers or phonies but as people who ‘do not know ... Misdirected in their fundamental understanding of God’s purpose, they are incapable of discerning the authentic meaning of the signs staring them in the face ... here, the sign requiring interpretation is the reality of family division—itsself a manifestation of Jesus’ divine mission and a portent of coming judgment.” (JG, 511-512)
- 12:56 “**Interpret**’ (twice) is a bit of a stretch as a translation of the Greek word *dokimazo*. The basic meaning of this word group is ‘to test’ ... The people ‘regard the appearances of earth and sky as worthwhile or appropriate.’ That is, I think, they will take the time to check the direction of the wind. They plan their planting or harvesting or picnics or travel accordingly. They take seriously the direction of the wind and let that determine their actions. Could we possibly take as seriously the signs of our times?” (BPS)

Reflection Questions:

- “What signs help you interpret the times correctly?” (SB, 169)
- Are there spiritual signs in your life that help you interpret or show you where you are in your life or your relationship with God?

Day 5

Reread the entire Scripture:

- Does anything significant or new stand out for you with this reading?
- After studying and meditating on this Scripture, what do you think God might be saying to you?

Reread the entire Scripture again.

- What prayer rises up in you (what would you like to say to God) after reflecting (listening to what God had to say to you) on this Scripture?

Reflection questions:

- From David Lose: “What holds us back from embracing the kingdom life Jesus both describes and demands? What fears, pressures, and stresses distract us from the mission to which Jesus has called us?”
- From Stoffregen: “Sometime ago I read this question: ‘With all the different peace groups around the world, why hasn’t the world become more peaceful?’ The answer given was that each group wanted their own kind of peace. They wanted world peace on their own terms and in their own way -- and that could put the different peace groups in conflict with each other. (Could the same be said of our different denominations and congregations? ‘We want to convert the world to Christianity -- as long as it’s our kind of Christianity.’)”

- What is your thinking on the above question? Journal.

Quote by Erick J. Thompson, *Working Preacher*

“This accusation of hypocrisy is an important one to consider seriously as we live out life in the church. Do we allow ourselves to hear God’s call again and again, or do we rest comfortably in our perfect church attendance or other human work? Another way to put this is: Why do we insist on pretending to ignore the injustices (racial and otherwise) around us? Most likely the answer is that we don’t want to see what’s really happening or our role in the injustices of the world. There is clearly an opportunity to talk about the ‘elephant in the room’ for many contexts. Simply naming an issue might be gospel for many, and may be that kairoic event that changes everything. It may lead to division, but, we have to trust that God is at work in all situations, and remember that God has claimed us in our baptisms, not because we’ve been perfect Christians.”

Quote by David Lose, WP, Luther Seminary

“Yet if we fear undergoing this baptism by fire, we might take comfort in the simple yet stark fact the Lord who comes to baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit first embraced his own baptism -- experiencing harm that we might know healing, undergoing judgment that we might know pardon, suffering death that we might know life, both now and in the world to come. Thus, looking backward to Jesus and his baptism, we find the courage to look forward to discern the signs and challenges of our own times, joining our hopes and fears to those of Christians throughout the centuries by praying, ‘Come, Lord Jesus.’”

Two Quotes by Culpepper's In *Luke*, New Interpreters Bible
As found in commentary by Brian Stoffregen

“Repeatedly, the warnings about the coming judgment have forced us to examine the implications of our commitments. It is all too easy to make commitments in one area of life as though they did not affect other areas also. Jesus warned that those who make a commitment to him will be persecuted, that a commitment of faith also means that our attitude toward material possessions must change, and that moral responsibilities must be taken with even greater seriousness. Now Jesus warns that persons who make a commitment to him will find their relationships to others, even those closest to them, affected by that commitment. We cannot make a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord without its affecting the way we related to friends and to family members. Because our commitment to Christ shapes our values, priorities, goals, and behavior, it also forces us to change old patterns of life, and these changes may precipitate crises in significant relationships. [p. 267]”

And

“To what do we pay close attention, and to what do we turn a blind eye? ...

Jesus' sayings challenge us to examine the inconsistencies between attention and neglect in our own lives, but the underlying challenge is to consider whether these inconsistencies reveal a pattern of prioritizing the insignificant while jeopardizing the things of greatest value and importance. Have we given as much attention to the health of the church as we have to our golf score? Have we given as much attention to the maintenance of our spiritual disciplines as to the maintenance schedule for our car? Where in the scale of our attention to detail does our devotion to the teachings of our Lord rank? [p. 269]"

Quote by Stephen P. McCutchan
In *Water from the Rock: Lectionary Devotional for Cycle C*

"These are hard sayings for the church. In many churches the emphasis is on not upsetting people rather than challenging them with the urgency of the gospel ...None of us like to have our assumptions about life challenged, and yet the gospel described Jesus as having repeatedly challenged the mores of his society and the accommodations that many of the religious leaders of his day had made with the society within which they lived ...While the gospel recognized that faithfulness might well cause division within the church as it challenged people's comfortable accommodations with society, the gospel also lifted up Jesus' life as the guide for our behavior. The baptism with which Jesus was baptized was a life that continually was lived out in compassion for others. While Jesus lost some disciples because the good news he proclaimed was too upsetting for them, he did not lose any because he lacked compassion for them." (246-247)

Psalm 82

¹God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:

²"How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Selah

³Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.

⁴Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

⁵They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk around in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

⁶I say, "You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you;

⁷nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince."

⁸Rise up, O God, judge the earth; for all the nations belong to you!