

“Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?” Jesus asks in our gospel reading today. Well, yes, Jesus I do. I have heard the words of the prophet Isaiah who proclaimed a messiah to the people who was the Prince of Peace. At your birth, angels sang “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” Evangelist John has you saying “peace, my peace I leave with you”. So, yes, Lord Jesus, I did think that you came to bring peace to the earth.

Here in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke, Jesus is heating things up - he's on fire and wishes the rest of the world were, too. Jesus is on a tear in this part of Luke's gospel, not only for our gospel reading today, but the entire section. Some of what he says he addresses only to his disciples, some he talks to the entire crowd. Before today's reading he is talks about economics, greed, earnings, thieves and masters and readiness of slaves.

The message of the gospel this morning turns up the heat. It burns us. We want to hear there will be peace and that God will bring it. We would much rather talk about God's unending love and mercy. We come in here for refuge from a week of putting fires out. Often we come in here burnt out from hard work, burning with regret or pain, wounded from the divisions of our lives, and we are thirsty for relief. We would much rather hear a comforting message and soothing words of Jesus about a lighter yoke and the greatness of God. Though fiery hot, and hard to hear, the gospel message is good news for us today.

Jesus is intent upon his mission. In Luke 4, Jesus announced his mission - to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to let the oppressed go free. Jesus demands that we pay attention; that we look not only to the horizon and the sun and rain, but look beside us, inside us, at our ways of being and how we've organized ourselves.

So let me ask you this – Are you happy with the healthcare system? With housing prices and cost of living? Who among us

thinks there are just wages for workers around the world? Who among us thinks there is freedom around the world? Who among us thinks the environment is ship-shape? That farming and growing of foods is safe, healthy and respectful?

See, if Jesus were speaking to a world in his day and ours where justice prevailed, where all people and creation were healthy – then Jesus' words would be disturbing. Then these words would mean an upset of a balance and harmony of creation that God intends, longs for and works toward. As it is –as they are - Jesus' words challenge and oppose the status quo – oppose oppression and broken systems.

This is good news because we have a God who doesn't whitewash our problems, or that of the world. In Jesus we come to know God who is angered by the pain and suffering of this world. In Jesus we come to know God impatient for refining fires. In Jesus we come to know God who demands commitment no matter the cost. In Jesus we come to know God frustrated by our ability to watch for the weather, or watch the stock market, yet not see the end of the world as we know it and the coming of God's kingdom.

In Jesus we come to know God who always has bigger and better plans for us than we can think of on our own. When Jesus spoke these words, many Israelites assumed that the Messiah would usher in a time of shalom.<sup>1</sup> They wanted peace in the world so they could worship freely. Freedom of worship is one part of shalom, but God's shalom is wholeness. God's shalom is healing -not complacency, not comfort where what is wrong in the world is ignored. Jesus burns for us to know the truth.

Jesus burns for us to know God is not at peace when the poor are neglected and the hungry unfed. Jesus burns for us to know God is not at peace when the sick are untended and the defective cast out.

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<sup>1</sup> This Week in Preaching; attributed to Stephen Wright in the Lectionary Commentary.

When is the last time you were on fire? On fire such that you couldn't help but speak up at a work meeting where a colleague was treated unjustly, where a custodial or service staff were let go or passed over for a raise because times are tight? When was the last time you were on fire to start a new ministry here at First Trinity? Or in your neighborhood? When was the last time you were on fire to spend time with the elderly? Your family? Or on fire to look at your spending habits, what you buy – where and how it was made? When was the last time you were on fire to have conscious contact with God through prayer and meditation?

Most fires start with a little spark, some from the fanning of an ember. Is not my world like fire, says the Lord, in Jeremiah. God's word is sometimes a spark, an ember to be fanned; sometimes it is a raging fire within. However small or large the fire, the Lord's word calls until answered. Sometimes the call to God's shalom calls to places and actions that are divisive, that separate. Yet, God does bring us peace even in the midst of division and brokenness and violence. God promises us, too, something better, one day, that we might all be made perfect.

So hear God's word, like fire. Draw near to Christ, and catch fire.

Amen.