Jeremiah 23:23-29

Psalm 82

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

Luke 12:49-56

“Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?” Love brings us together… right? Jesus heals us and makes us sisters and brothers… I thought? AND I think that is right, but then there are Jesus’ words. Who Jesus is and who we want Him to be… who the world says Jesus is, the Jesus the world believes in, and the real Jesus we meet in our hearts through Scripture… those two are not the same. Jesus, gentle, meek and mild is not who Jesus is… not the Jesus who we meet in the Scriptures. Jesus is… He’s fierce. Pharisees… who believe in the world and hold the Law over people… they believe in Jesus meek and mild… to keep Him quiet. Jesus doesn’t listen to those folk. Jesus brings a sword and fire and division, not peace.

Fire is dangerous. Where the fire comes from matters. Was it a controlled fire? Was it needed to clear dead wood and debris? Was it an accident and out of control? Are people in danger now? The when and how for fire matter. Jesus brings fire and division. So does the world. So where the fire comes from matters.

See, the world’s way looks like the way of Jesus. Jesus, gentle, meek and mild sounds like gospel to people… and that is false. Jesus is not afraid to call out the Pharisees and scribes and lawyers and leaders of Israel. See, Jesus doesn’t come after the people who are vulnerable and hurting and disliked. He set Himself against the leaders and the lawyers and the Pharisees. When our hearts are on the way of Jesus, we run into fire and division.

That is fire and division. Hearing Jesus’ words is tough. Folks want Jesus, gentle, meek and mild. NOT the untame Lion of Judah. We want the Jesus who is friends with everyone, who doesn’t talk about religion and politics at the table, who doesn’t ask us to bring fire and division. But He says that is lukewarm broth. That isn’t Jesus.

We need the fire of the Spirit. God is where we get our fire. Our fire is love. The sword Jesus brought to divide us cuts through the heart. “From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they 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.” Jesus’ Spirit of Love cuts through our hearts, through our ties to each other. Pharisees hear the Spirit of Love but hear judgment. They don’t understand love.

So how do we find the Spirit of Love? How can we understand love? Maybe we don’t. Maybe we don’t need to. The Spirit of Love will find us! She takes hold of our hearts. The divisions and the walls and the laws and the rules… everything that used to judge a sister or to shut out a brother… in the fire of love, it all burns up.

For now, in this world, that leaves us divided. None of us wants to get burned… by that fire, right? That is the tough word we hear today. But that is the promise. It hurts to be changed. Burning away our barriers is frightening. In the end, we are left with the gift of a promise. In Paul’s words, nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So that is harsh and a promise and a gift all at once. It is all a gift… above everything else. We live, really, by grace alone. There is no falling short. There is no rule to live up to. There is only freedom in Jesus: you are loved… completely, and you are accepted… no matter what you are or who you are.

Eventually, I think, in my experience anyway, I have to pass through the fire. The Spirit’s fire of love burns me away. So there are no sides in all this in the end. There is no us left to take sides. God’s fire is for all of us. The hearts we have now will not be our hearts. I will love who I cannot love right now. Because I will be living in the heart of our God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit… as a child of God. There will be no walls between us left. No laws to keep people out of the Kingdom.

That’s the Gospel… I think. That’s the Gospel I hear right now. We are free in Jesus Christ. Our lives are hidden in Him. So we have nothing to fear. Yes, we fall short of love. We do. Oh well. We live by grace alone.

Let us pray: Father, You make us new in the image and likeness of Your Son. Jesus, You set us free by Your Spirit to live by grace alone. Spirit, You fill us with the fire of love so we can live for each other. God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, carry us and move us to stand up for our hurting sisters and brothers in the name of our Savior Jesus. Amen.