

August 14, 2022 – Luke 12:49-56

Have you ever had to do something you absolutely dreaded doing? Maybe it was a medical procedure. My sister was recently talking about that. She had surgery a couple weeks ago to remove some precancerous tissue. If she did nothing, it would have almost certainly become cancerous eventually.

It had to be removed. But that didn't make the prospect of going under general anesthetic and suffering through the soreness and healing afterwards any easier to deal with. She dreaded that surgery, even though she knew it had to happen.

Maybe it was something else. A conversation you really didn't want to have. You were dreading it, but it had to happen. Maybe it was a decision you had to make. A case where you were stuck between a rock and a hard place. Where there was no good answer. And you were dreading the choice, even though you knew it had to happen.

Life is full of these moments. Times when we must do something even though we dread what it will mean. Dread the outcome. Dread the suffering we'll have to endure because of it.

Jesus is at such a moment in our Gospel lesson. He's looking ahead to his own future. The end of his own earthly ministry. And he dreads what he sees. He dreads it for two reasons.

First, he dreads the baptism that is approaching. Now, most of us would look at that and ask, "Why in the world is Jesus dreading a baptism?" Baptisms are wonderful! We had one this morning. And it was adorable! A cute baby girl all dressed up in a pretty white gown. Her parents and sponsors standing around, smiling happily. Three splashes of water. The Triune name of God in our ears. It looks like such a happy moment. And it is.

But it's also something else. That baptism this morning was Olivia Meyer's death. She died in that water. Not physically. That won't happen for many, many years to come, Lord willing.

But, spiritually, she died. Her old, sinful nature was held under the water and drown. It was crucified by the Word of God. Buried in a grave. So that a new Olivia Meyer could rise from the dead and walk in newness of life for the rest of her days.

How did this happen? Well, it happened because by the Word of God that baptismal water in the font was connected to Christ's own baptism. Not just His baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. Her baptism was connected to Christ's baptism on the cross.

That's what Jesus is talking about in this passage. He calls his own death and resurrection a baptism. A baptism for him and a baptism for us.

And it distresses him to think about that baptism. He still goes through with it, of course. He came to this earth to suffer, die, and rise again. He loves us too much to do anything but finish that journey to the cross.

But it still distresses him. He still dreads it. He dreads the cross as much as we dread going under the knife or having a painful conversation or making an impossible choice. He didn't want to do it. He cries out to his father in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Save me from this hour... Take this cup from me."

He was sorrowful to the point of death. To the point that he sweat drops of blood and had to be strengthened by angels. Jesus dreaded the cross. But he still wanted to see it accomplished.

That's what he says here, "*How great is my distress until it is accomplished!*" He dreaded the cross, but three little words made it all worthwhile: "*It is finished.*" Seeing you saved. Taking little Olivia's sin on his shoulders and carrying it to the grave. All the distress of the cross went away as soon as that was accomplished.

Jesus dreaded the cross for the suffering it would entail. But he also dreaded something else. He dreaded what it would mean for his followers. Because our lives are fundamentally changed by Jesus' death and resurrection. Little Olivia's life is fundamentally changed because she is baptized into God's name.

And that change brings about division. We don't normally think about Jesus bringing division into the world. But that's exactly what he tells us. That's exactly what he promises to us.

Which feels rather odd. He asks, *“Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth?”* Well... um... yes? Yeah, Jesus, I do. That's kinda what the angels promised at your birth, wasn't it? *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”* Was that all a lie?

Well, no. But we have to recognize who that peace is with. The angels were proclaiming peace with God. Through Jesus, through His baptism, through our baptism, God was pleased with us. *“This is my Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased.”* You are my son whom I love, with you I am well pleased. And that brought us peace.

And Jesus reiterates that peace over and over again. He tells his disciples at the Last Supper, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.”* And on Easter evening, he appears to those disciples and the first words out of his mouth are, *“Peace be with you.”* Paul sums it up in Romans 5: *“We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

But peace with God is not the same thing as peace with the world. It could never be. Because our righteous God and our sinful world are fundamentally at war with each other. If you stand on one side, then you are fighting the other. There is no middle ground.

Apart from the work of Christ, we are divided from God. Alienated from him. Enemies of His Kingdom. We have no part in his life or his grace.

But, in that state, we are also friends of the world. We want the same things that the world does. We're driven by the same sinful passions that the world is driven by. We spend our lives seeking money and pride and sex and selfishness. And we understand the world, because they're seeking the same thing.

But then everything changes. We are baptized into God's Triune name. We hear the Word and the seed of the Gospel grows in our hearts. Suddenly, the world doesn't make as much sense to us. It's still very, very tempting. Don't get me wrong. But the love of God just seems so much better. The will of God seems like such a better purpose for our lives.

And we find ourselves divided from the world. Divided even from our own family and friends. Our own households. Because we're not fighting on the same side anymore. We're not fighting on the world's side against those stupid Christians. We're fighting on the Kingdom of God's side against those forces of sin and evil that only want to steal, kill, and destroy.

Jesus is not telling us in this passage that he wants us to argue with our family members. He's simply telling us a hard truth: if you're on his side, then you are not on the world's side. And that will divide you.

It distresses him to say that. Because he is the prince of peace. And he looks forward to a day when the lion lays down with the lamb. When armies lay down their swords and beat them into plows. He looks forward to a day when there is peace on earth in every way. Peace with God. Peace between men. Peace for all eternity. That day is coming. And we rejoice that it is.

But until then, we have to pick a side. You'll notice, when Jesus describes the household in this passage, it's a household of five. Three against two. Two against three. One side will win. One side will lose. You can't sit out this fight. You can't sit on the fence. It's not two against two, with one abstaining. It's not two against two, but one guy thinks both sides make a good point.

Three against two. Two against three. You have to pick a side. And somebody will win. Somebody will lose. In this life, more often than not, the Christian will lose. He will be shouted down, mocked, and persecuted. In the next life, the unbeliever will definitely lose. He will suffer eternal death.

There's no way around it. But in the meantime, there is something we can do: We can bring others into the Kingdom of God. We can baptize our children, teach them God's Word, pray for them, and bring them one day to the Lord's Supper. So that we never see the day when our own homes are divided.

And for those homes that are already divided, we reach out with God's love and we pray. Pray that the God of all peace would end the division in our homes and communities by bringing those we love into the family of faith. Make us one in the body of Christ. Baptized into his death and resurrection. And awaiting the day when there is peace on earth once again. Amen.