

**Text: Luke 12:49-53**

*I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! 51 Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. 52 From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.*

In a church like ours, most baptisms are infant baptisms, and so, a baby two weeks old or two months old isn't likely to worry about what's going to be done to him or her when they are baptized. Some of the baptisms administered in churches like this one are adult baptisms, and so, if you're 15 or if you're 35, being baptized doesn't hold any huge terrors.

But occasionally the person who comes forward for baptism is considerably older than a baby yet a whole lot younger than an adult – let's say a child of 3 or 4 or five years old. A child that age is big enough to know something is going to be done to him, yet little enough to be really frightened about what it's going to be. And it doesn't help when an older brother or cousin or playmate taunts him with all kinds of horror stories: "Just wait! First they're going to take all your clothes off and then they're going to push you into this big tank and hold you under till you drown!"

When a 3 or 4 or 5 year old is going to be baptized, it's helpful that parents or me or all of us explain exactly what's going to happen. We can show the child what the baptism furniture looks like – "See, it's just a bowl of water. Nobody's going to push you in!" We can describe how I'll take three handfuls of that water and stroke it across his forehead and say, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." We can tell him that by being baptized is this special way Jesus makes us His very own brothers and sisters. And most of all, we can reassure him, "Baptism doesn't hurt."

If Jesus were standing nearby, listening, it's possible He would offer one slight correction: "This baptism doesn't hurt." He'd say that, because it's obvious from today's Gospel – from His own words – that there is another baptism, a baptism you and I probably don't know nearly as much about. We had better find out some more about this other baptism, don't you think? And we do need to know that

**The Other Baptism is the One that Hurts!**

- 1. It compelled the Savior to the agony of the cross.**
- 2. It causes the Savior's followers the heartbreak of division.**

**1. It compelled the Savior to the agony of the cross.**

We all know what happened at Jesus' first baptism. It took place at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing (John 1:28). It was performed when Jesus was about 30 years old, and it marked the beginning of the three years of his public ministry (Luke 3:23). In that first baptism Jesus fully identified with sinners. John's baptism was *a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Luke 3:3)* Jesus needed no repentance and no forgiveness for himself, yet he said, *It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness. (Matthew 3:15)*. He was being baptized as our Substitute. In that first baptism, Jesus received a special gift of the Holy Spirit to carry on his ministry. *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and [after that baptism] he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. (Acts 10:38)* At that first baptism, all three persons of the Triune God appeared: the Spirit of God descended like a dove and landed on him, the Son made human like us was coming up out of the water, the Father spoke in that majestic voice from heaven, *This is my son whom I love; with him I am well pleased (Matthew 3:16, 17)*.

Jesus was now talking about another baptism: *I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!* It was, as Jesus called it, *fire on the earth*. Fire, you know, can have a purging, cleansing effect. In Isaiah, the Lord said to Israel, *See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction (Isaiah 48:10)*. Peter, in his first letter, talked about *gold . . . refined*

by fire (1 Peter 1:7). Being brought through the fire is hardly pleasant, but it can be useful. It was, Jesus said, a baptism – not a baptism in which he would be pushed under the water, but a baptism in which he would be bolted onto a cross. In the baptism done by John, the Savior identified with sinners; in the baptism of his death, He would carry their load of sin and guilt. The muddy waters of the Jordan led to the bloody waters of Calvary.

And He was eager to get on with it: *How I wish it were already kindled! . . . How distressed I am until it is completed!* Distressed? Sure, if you consider the agony Jesus was soon to go through. He was feeling this personal misery more and more as he came closer to Calvary. *Now my heart is troubled*, Jesus said another time, at about this same time, *and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. (John 12:27)* Jesus wasn’t bionic – this was going to hurt! But this was why he was here. He was compelled to get on with it. He was absorbed by it, driven to it. Nothing else mattered for Him. He wanted to see it accomplished. He never entertained a thought of escaping it.

### **That was the other baptism – the one that hurt. It compelled the Savior to the agony of the cross.**

This doesn’t sound much like our “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,” does it? This doesn’t quite square with our favorite picture: “Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head . . .” This doesn’t exactly fit our sometimes careful, tender notions about Jesus, as though he were some soft, easy-going character, too nice for words, too good to be real, too tame to do any good. *I have a baptism to undergo*, He said – not some harmless looking little affair by the church furniture, but a violent, agonizing ordeal on a cross. It was the first baptism, the one with water, that started Him on this journey toward the other one, and this other baptism was going to hurt.

But the cure for our sins required nothing less than that.

### **2. It causes the Savior’s followers the heartbreak of division.**

Even the oldest of us has no personal recollection of the American Civil War. We have to learn about it from the history books. Possibly the most tragic aspect of that entire unhappy conflict more than a century ago was how it split families right down the middle. Very literally, brother fought against brother. Samuel P. Lee was the commander of the Union naval forces along the James River in Virginia; his cousin Robert E. Lee rose to command the entire Confederate army. Senator John J. Crittenden of Kentucky had framed the last desperate attempt in Congress to hold the Union together. He had two sons: Major General T. L. Crittenden fought for the Union army; Major General G. B. Crittenden served the Confederate Army. Abraham Lincoln was president of the United States during the Civil War; Mrs. Abraham Lincoln lost three brothers fighting for the Confederate States. Three grandsons of Henry Clay fought for the North, four others for the South. In a house on West 20<sup>th</sup> Street in New York, a little boy named Theodore Roosevelt prayed for the Union armies, while his mother, who was born in Georgia, prayed for her three brothers fighting in the Confederate army.

It must have been the most heartbreaking kind of division. But when you really believe in something, and when you have vowed that you will stand for something, division will come.

Jesus said, *Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.* He did indeed bring peace. We are not mistaken to ascribe majestic prophecy – *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)* – to him. The angels were telling the truth when they sang, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests (Luke 2:14)* He was not simply being polite when He told his disciples, *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you (John 14:27)*. It was a reality when the resurrected Savior told that huddled bunch behind locked doors, *Peace be with you! (John 20:19)* St. Paul was well informed when he wrote, *He himself is our peace (Ephesians 2:14)*. *Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1)*. If Jesus had not come, the earth could have gone on in its peaceful, undisturbed way, like a baloney bull peacefully grazing, never realizing that by tomorrow at this time he’ll be hamburger. We could have gone on, unconcerned, blissfully uninformed, straight to God’s judgment. He came to take away that guilt and judgment.

But his peace can be either accepted or rejected. There are those two dreadful alternatives: *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16)*, and because the good news can also be spurned, the angels might just as well have sung, “On earth division!” That same good news, *which is to some the fragrance of life*,

*is to others the smell of death* (2 Corinthians 2:16). It will cause division when some accept it while others do not. And the dividing lines, as in the American Civil War, can split families right down the middle: *From now on there will five in one family divided against each other, 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 daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.*

**The other baptism is the one that hurts – hurts us: It causes the Savior’s followers the heartbreak of division.**

This other baptism will put your loyalty to the ultimate test. Have you ever been in the painful predicament, wondering, “Who is the most important person in my life, my spouse or my Savior? My son or God’s Son?” Jesus has already answered that question. He must be the most important. *Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me (Matthew 10:37).* No person, no organization, no country, can claim your first loyalty, only the Savior. It may cause no turmoil in your life at all, or it may cause you the greatest heartbreak you can ever know. But He must be first, and He understands what it’s like: *Even his own brothers did not believe in him. (John 7:5).*

The first baptism doesn’t hurt. Millions of people can attest to that. But **the second baptism does.** It hurt the Savior – **it compelled him to the agony of the cross.** And it can hurt us – **it can cause us the heartbreak of division.**

It can hurt, but it won’t hurt forever.

Amen.