



**Worship Series: “The Hospitality of Jesus”**

13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

“What Christ Offers”—Sermon Text: Luke 12:49-56

FUMC Arlington, Texas 76011

14 August 2016

“This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace;  
the shelter, not only from injury, but from all terror, doubt and division”

--John Ruskin (1819 - 1900).

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This sermon is part of our summer worship series called “The Hospitality of Jesus,” but after you hear this text you will think we misnamed the morning’s sermon and should have titled it instead: “The Hostility of Jesus!”

Today’s lesson is Luke 12:49-56. The context is that, according to Luke, Jesus arrival opens the New Age. This is what the Messiah brings—a new world and a new way of life. That Jesus should usher in this new kind of living should not surprise us because John the Baptizer had already said: “His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (Luke 3:17). In other words: out with the old and in with the new. Notable, our lesson offers different words to two audiences. Jesus’ first words address the disciples (vv. 49-53), while the second part (vv. 54-56) Jesus speaks to the crowds/multitude. Hear these words that speak to new life in Jesus:

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

54 He 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. 55 And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. 56 You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time” (Luke 12:49-56)?

I offer three features regarding this lesson and about Scripture as well. The first point is that Semitic culture from which our Bible comes is a culture given to hyperbole—that is Semitic people use overstated or exaggerated language. Of course, we modern Americans are also given to hyperbole. We understand our own types of exaggeration. When we say “it is raining cats and dogs,” few people who hear this phrase phone PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) or the SPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals). Our meaning is self-evident, and so we think, clear.

This means that Jesus’ Semitic culture was a culture in which exaggerated speech was customary. Thus when Jesus says that he came to bring a sword—which cuts against the grain of most of our Prince of Peace images of Jesus—he meant that in the new order that the Messiah brings: God will subjugate every other loyalty to God’s will. So when Jesus says, “they will be divided: father against son . . . mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law” this exaggerated speech means old bonds no longer hold when the Messiah comes. This too is what a startling saying of Jesus means: “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). There is but one priority—that is loyalty to God—first and foremost.

Now that the messiah Jesus has come, everything is different [John Pilch and Bruce Malina in the *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (Hendrickson: 1998)] . . . note that in modern Western society, culture is tied to precision; time is a commodity, and dramatic orientation wastes time by not getting to the point. Unlike in the ancient world, when dramatic speech and eloquence were held in high esteem, “Creativity, imagination, and boasting are activities that waste precious time” and “have no place in a society driven by productivity: machines will tolerate no exaggeration, imprecision, or tardiness” (tektonics.org/gk/hyperbole)].

A second feature of our text this morning is that there is a certain elegance/violence of language. This kind of language that the Bible advances, is at times frustrating to “microwave generation” readers. Let me offer an example. Often the Bible delivers material directly. For

example when Paul speaks about how love undergirds “spiritual gifts” we recall Paul writing to Corinth: “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). But regularly the Bible speaks with more flair as when Luke relates one of Jesus’ most memorable parables: “Then Jesus said, ‘There was a man who had two sons . . . ’” (Luke 15:11)—Some topic agape love; same message—different style.

A third point begins in a question: do you remember when I said that our Scripture today is really two different lessons to two different audiences? The first words are to the disciples (vv. 49-53), while the second part of the lesson is to the crowds (vv. 54-56)? The first part of our lesson reminds us that our old alliances in the old age will be completely changed in the age ushered in by the Messiah. That is what bringing the sword means. As in olden days kinship ties were the most valued, now with the coming of Messiah what matters most is simply faithfulness to God.

In the last part of our text—our third point—Jesus rebukes hypocrites who can read the signs of nature, but cannot read the spiritual signs of the time. Thus in the Messianic day the faithful will read signs—the spiritual signs of God’s coming.

In Northwest Texas it is easy to see a blue norther coming. This natural sign lets people who see it know that soon it will turn very cold. A blue norther arrives with screaming winds that produce a thick, threatening blanket of stratus clouds. These clouds look blueish grey as they approach, thus the colorful name. One classic blue norther hit the central plains in November of 1911. In just a matter of hours after the front passed, temperatures in Oklahoma City dropped from a balmy record high of 83 Fahrenheit to a record low of 17 ([weathernotebook.org/transcripts/2000/11/21](http://weathernotebook.org/transcripts/2000/11/21)). Jesus’ point was simply this: if people can read the signs of nature, then why do they not see the kingdom signs of God’s in-breaking?

What kingdom signs need interpretation in our time and place? Jesus in this lesson speaks



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of signs of destruction and disaster, but are there not also signs of hope? Is there anyone in the public square or in popular media who is the voice of hope and hopefulness? Perhaps the church as a counter-cultural sign can be a voice that speaks hope to a desolate culture. “As Eliphaz the Temanite asked Job so perhaps Jesus could ask us: ‘Is not your fear/respect/reverence for God your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope?’ ” (Job 4:6). Amen.

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