



The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Savior Sabbath Survival Kit



TWELFTH SUNDAY OF PENTECOST, AUGUST 19, 2007

The candles that grace our worship seem like gentle lights, but fire is a powerful and purging force. Fire is used to purify molten ore and burn away the dross. In this day's worship, God's word comes among us like raging fire, consuming what is false and leaving behind pure gold.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, judge eternal, you love justice and hate oppression, and you call us to share your zeal for truth. Give us courage to take our stand with all victims of bloodshed and greed, and, following your servants and prophets, to look to the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

FIRST LESSON - JEREMIAH 23:23-29

Am I a God near by, says the Lord, and not a God far off? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord. I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed!" How long? Will the hearts of the prophets ever turn back—those who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart? They plan to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, just as their ancestors forgot my name for Baal. Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the Lord. Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?

SECOND LESSON - HEBREWS 11:29-12:2

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace. And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

HOLY GOSPEL - LUKE 12:49-56

"I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! 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." 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. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. 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?"

If ever we needed to strengthen the institution of family, it's today. The time demands on everyone, including children, makes 'togetherness' a less frequent occurrence. Add to that the benefits/pitfalls of modern technology, we can stay constantly in touch, without being face-to-face; we can access information and entertainment instantly and be lost in our own little world. We can avoid being very available by staying very busy.

Into this complex reality, Jesus throws yet another obligation: "what about my mission?" What about it, Lord? "Which is also your mission?" Oh! "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?" Yeah, kind of, that's what we were hoping for! "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ... Not peace. No, I tell you, but rather division!" And then Jesus describes some possible divisions within a household. Our Gospel Lesson, Jesus' words, don't seem to be a way to focus on good family relationships!

Jesus and Jeremiah are on a holy tear in today's readings. This is not 'the little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head.' This is not the pastoral, good shepherd Jesus. This is a more macho Jesus, Jesus on a mission; the Jesus on which all of history turns; the Jesus we don't want to deal with either.

All of us are baptized; we are adding a baptized member to the church universal as well as to our community of faith today. But Jesus is talking about a baptism of fire; for him it meant suffering and death. For us it means taking up our cross and following him. A proper understanding of Jesus' mission leads to the insight that the peace God promised beginning in ancient times will be costly and filled with conflict. Jesus goes to the Cross, and that challenges every existing social unit including the most basic one, the family. Change is demanded; decision is required. The revolutionary character of the Gospel, 'love one another as I have loved you,' challenges all aspects of the existing order. The reality of division in Jesus' day is testimony to the dawning of this new age.

How do we see this played out within those social units – the act of taking up one's own cross and trying to minister to needs as Jesus did? For Jesus, as he addresses us today, it surely meant the division between non-believers and believers, the zealot believers caught up in the new movement we now call Christianity. Today the division may be more subtle, even among believers. In the church we would differentiate between inactive and active; active not meaning radical zealots (the kind of gung-ho people who can turn you off to religion), but those who are active in faith, who are responding seriously to their baptism; who see the needs of their community and the world and act on them. They worship regularly, and live as good stewards of their possessions and themselves, finding the time, precious as that resource is, to volunteer.

Hot lukewarm cold It causes divisions in churches, in families, and throughout society.

Do we ignore these divisions? Recognize them as reality and move on? I think Jesus would want us to be careful in rendering judgment – I'm active, you're not; I'm a sheep, you're a goat – that not only adds to the division, it probably helps create it. We ARE commanded to be active in our faith, taking up our cross, witnessing to the Good News of God's love. But when it comes to relating to those not yet on board, prayer, listening to God and also to one another, and sometimes challenging our less active sisters and brothers, can help break down barriers, and build community.

Amen

BLESSING

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. May you be rooted and grounded in his love. Amen.