

There's A Fire Burning

A Sermon on Luke 12:49-53

Year C - Pentecost 13

14 - August - 2016

JJ¹

The 2016 Summer Olympics are half over. We've seen some amazing things. American dominance has continued in the pool with Phelps and Ledecky. Surprise golds have amazed us while others were expected. The sport of competition on a global scale is an awesome thing to watch. But one of the things that always bugs me about the Olympics is how it always gets touted as this great peace-maker and example of what *could* be for the world. That way of thinking only betrays the arrogance of sinful man's heart. Even the Olympics cannot hide human nature and the consequences of sin.

Individuals, teams and even whole countries taunt one another before events and boast after victory. Le Clos shadow-boxing in front of Phelps. Then after the race Phelps boasting with the "Oh no you don't!" #1 finger raised and waving. Cheating and doping scandals seem to rock every Olympics in recent memory, but none like this year's state sponsored doping and coverup by Russia. There are sore losers, like Hope Solo of the women's soccer team, who after Friday's shocking loss to Sweden said Sweden played like cowards. Gruesome injuries plague athletes. The cameras spend time on the glittering Olympic venues and competition, but keep their gaze from

corruption, crime, disease and poverty just blocks away.

A place for peace in the world? I don't think so. Friends, **THERE'S A FIRE BURNING**, and I'm not talking about the Olympic flame burning in Rio, although there in Rio we see a smaller version of what spans the globe and time. It's the fire Jesus teaches us about today.

At first, what we hear from Jesus' lips sounds strange at best, and maybe even wrong at worst. Even though the Olympics can't bring peace to Rio, wherever Jesus brings his Word and makes his presence known brings nothing but unity and harmony, right? Look at what Jesus says.

"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! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division."

You might be wondering to yourselves, "Didn't the angels sing at his birth, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests"? Didn't Jesus himself say, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you"? And you're right. That's exactly what Jesus

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

came to do and has done. But Jesus is the Prince of Peace by his standards, not the world's. And the peace Jesus is talking about today isn't the peace he has made between God and man through his sacrifice. The peace Jesus is talking about today is peace here on earth between people, or the lack thereof.

Jesus destroys any room for us to think that we will all live happily ever after this side of heaven now that Jesus has come. Because of sin and unbelief that cannot be true in the world, in the church and even in our own families! Jesus says, "From now on there will be 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."

Friends, there will always be a **fire burning** wherever stubborn hearts want to cling to sin rather than repent. It's a fire of division, not peace. We see it when Cain killed his believing brother Abel. We see this as Ishmael persecuted his younger half-brother Isaac. Not one of us has to look very far in our family tree to see this most heart-wrenching dividing fire burning.

You find this **fire burning** as your child or grandchild who refuses to gather to-

gether with you in God's house for worship. You see this **fire burning** every time you encourage them and they lash out or fill your ears with empty excuses. *They* create division in the family as *they* work to divide themselves from the family of God!

You find this in your brother or sister who has decided to set God's plan aside and live with their boyfriend, girlfriend or fiancée. You confront them with their sin, but they rationalize their sin saying that it makes financial sense; it would be

good to try it out first to make sure it works; it doesn't really matter because we're all sinners; or that society has moved on and doesn't consider it to be wrong. *They* divide the family as *they* would rather shame the family and worse, shame Christ who died for them! And instead of knowing the love of

Christ they show hatred towards the world by setting an example of sin for all the world to see! And on top of all this they still want to call themselves a secure child of God!

You find the **fire burning** between you and the cousin who went off to the University which robbed them of their faith. They come home and mock you for your weak simple-mindedness for thinking there is actually a God out there who loves you.



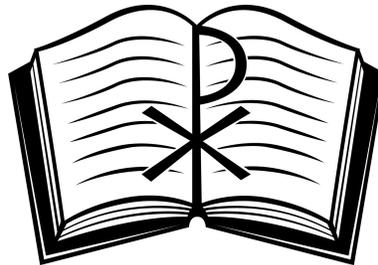
You find this **fire burning** with those who have gone off to worship the false gods of the eastern religions like Buddhism, or even those who claim to be Christian but have created their own god like the Mormons or the Jehovah Witnesses who deny the God of Scripture.

These divisions are terrible. They can bring enormous amounts of heartbreak, stress and sleepless nights into our lives. We want this dividing fire to be put out and to be united again. But there is a wrong way and a right way to reunite. The wrong way is through mankind's external peace of ceasefire and compromise. The right way is, of course, only through Jesus. It's only through a common faith in Jesus that people here on earth can have real peace with one another.

Jesus has set this world ablaze, and he did it with a burning desire to save you and all people. Jesus endured "a baptism" of fiery judgment that distressed his soul so much before it happened, that in the Garden of Gethsemane, he sweat in prayer and anguish as if he were bleeding! And then that fiery wrath of the Father consumed his holy soul with the sin and punishment of the world! And he did that so that we and all people could walk the path of true peace forever.

Though the gift of faith, Jesus has kindled a different fire in our hearts—the fire of his love. By faith, **THERE'S A FIRE**

BURNING in your hearts that wants to see your sinful nature die a fiery death every day so that you can walk in Jesus' peace. Because of this we are able to see that Jesus is not the enemy of real peace for us, our family, our congregation or even the world. But he *is* the enemy of every shaky truce our sinful hearts want to make with sin, both ours and the sin of others. Those outward peace treaties our sinful hearts love so much are what block Jesus' true peace from winning and holding our hearts. Until we get home to heaven, that fire will continue to burn in the world around us, and even lick at our own hearts as the Lord seeks to continually purify us and bring us further into his peace.



When **THERE'S A FIRE BURNING** it's never comfortable. Oh, you can try and ignore the division, turmoil and spiritual

poverty by focusing on other things like NBC focuses on the glitz and competition of the Olympics. But just like the Olympics cannot hide the problems of this world, neither can we create peace by ignoring the blazing fire. Instead, we must face the fire head-on, both in our hearts and in the world around us. It is God's mercy that kindles this fire because he doesn't want one person to be lost. It is God's Word, both Law and Gospel, that purifies our hearts from sin and all false notions of outward peace. Even though this fire divides, it divides righteousness from unrighteousness and therefore cannot harm the repentant heart.

Friends, Jesus' love is burning brightly. He passes that fire on to you, to burn sin from your life and to kindle in your hearts the love to bring his fire to this dying world. Jesus' burning love drives us to not shy away from the division between believer and unbeliever, especially in our own families, but to present them with real, lasting peace found only in Christ and not leave them lost in the failing façade of human peace. Consider Jesus and the fire he faced from sinful mankind "so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb. 12:3). Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.