

Now ignite us with your fire

[Luke 12:49-56](#)

My friends, this is a difficult gospel reading today.

It comes shortly after Jesus has been encouraging his listeners to stay awake and be dressed, ready for service. It seems to me that somehow Jesus has lost patience with his audience and in his exasperation is trying to stir them up, move them out of complacency. That certainly seems to be the interpretation of *Elton Trueblood who wrote the words of the hymn we just sang. Trueblood was a Quaker in the mid-20th century who served as an advisor to both Eisenhower and Nixon. He helped to create the World Council of Churches which aims to inspire the worldwide fellowship of churches to work together for unity, justice and peace.

Perhaps it should not surprise us when Jesus says that he came to bring division not peace since the Christian church has been a site of conflict and disagreement since the earliest days and religion has been used as an ideology fueling war for as long as humanity has existed. But I don't think that Jesus is talking about that as much as the struggle that brings true peace. He is the Prince of Peace but the paradox is that the promised peace, the shalom of God, does not come without struggle.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *the German theologian who spoke out against the Nazi regime, talked about "cheap grace". "Cheap grace", he said, "is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."

In contrast, he wrote

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it [one] will go and sell all that [one] has;... it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him. Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which [one] must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because

it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs [one's] life, and it is grace because it gives [one] the only true life.

I think this is what Jesus is talking about. About the challenge, the cost, the difficulty involved in creating true peace.

I want a peaceful life as much as the next person. *I want to be able to walk by the bay in the early morning when the water is still and the egrets are stalking and the sandpipers are flocking. I want to enjoy my coffee and feel the peace and serenity of God. I want to experience the companionship of a generous God whose grace supplies my needs and enables me to live with a quiet conscience. It's a lovely New Agey experience of abundance and prosperity.

But it's only part of the picture.

*I am called, we are called, to be Jesus' disciples. And Jesus' disciples did not spend their time meditating by the Sea of Galilee, drinking 1st century cappuccinos and listening to gentle parables.

As followers of Jesus we must expect to deal with the hard stuff. The hard work of nurturing relationships with people we don't like and find hard to respect; the hard work of bringing the parts of ourselves that we don't like into the light of Christ for healing; the hard work of living the reign of God right here, right now in a politically divided society; the hard stuff of praying when we don't feel like it, of having a spiritual discipline and sticking to it. Costly grace.

When I look around the congregation these days I see many gaps - *people who are not here. We have lost more members than normal in the last two years – people have moved, people have died, people who are just not coming to church anymore. And I see a congregation that is aging – we are not doing a good job of connecting younger people to the reign of God and to God's unconditional love. This is not news to you. This is why the Parish Council decided to invite *Deacon Jen to minister among us as a trailblazer with a particular focus on building our relationship with younger people.

That was a wise and visionary move. But we are deluding ourselves if we think that somehow on their own Jen will solve the problem. Jen can help us focus, Jen can help us make connections but Jen cannot and will not do it all. If this congregation is going to continue to love and serve God in Los Osos then we need to pivot and turn our attention to sharing God's love with a group of people we have not previously reached. If we stay complacent, thinking that we are doing everything we can in our work with the Abundance Shop, Community Dinners and People's Kitchen, nothing will change.

*We may not be as tuned in to the wind and the tides as Jesus' audience were, but we know the days when the marine layer will never burn off, we feel the difference between the cool on-shore wind and the hot offshore wind. How is it then, Jesus asks, that we don't notice what is happening and what God is wanting to do in our midst?

I know that we cannot all be actively involved in working with Jen in this new ministry. But my friends we can all pray. That requires little physical energy and relatively little time. Yet it is hard for most of us, including me. *Bonhoeffer said, "Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which [one] must knock."

The gift that we must ask for, the door on which we must knock, is that God will work among us in power, *that the wind and fire of Pentecost might blow through this place and through each one of us so that we may be emboldened, enlivened, made new... so that we may go out those red doors with such love in our hearts that we cannot help but communicate God's love and invitation to all people and especially those who are not yet part of our faith community.

When we believe that a relationship with the living God in community is life-giving and life-changing then we need to share that with those around us.

*When we consciously *intend* to invite younger people to a new and unexpected relationship with a God they may not yet know, and when

we all pray that this will happen – when we all pray earnestly that God will bring new people to worship and serve God with us, then this will be powerful. We are not trying to change God’s mind but to join our energy with God’s to create the church of tomorrow. A church which will continue to faithfully witness to God’s love and peace in difficult times. A church which will continue to stretch its boundaries and to meet the challenges of the day.

Let us turn back to Trueblood’s hymn and pray together as we sing the first verse:

God whose purpose is to kindle:
Now ignite us with your fire;
While the earth awaits your burning,
With your passion us inspire.
Overcome our sinful calmness,
Stir us with your saving name:
Baptize with your fiery Spirit,
Crown our lives with tongues of fire.