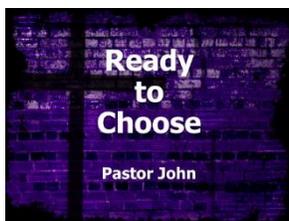


Ready to Choose

August 14, 2016

Luke 12: 49-56

*<sup>49</sup> I came to set fire to the earth, and I wish it were already on fire! <sup>50</sup> I am going to be put to a hard test. And I will have to suffer a lot of pain until it is over. <sup>51</sup> Do you think that I came to bring peace to earth? No indeed! I came to make people choose sides. <sup>52</sup> A family of five will be divided, with two of them against the other three. <sup>53</sup> Fathers and sons will turn against one another, and mothers and daughters will do the same. Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law will also turn against each other. <sup>54</sup> Jesus said to all the people: As soon as you see a cloud coming up in the west, you say, "It's going to rain," and it does. <sup>55</sup> When the south wind blows, you say, "It's going to get hot," and it does. <sup>56</sup> Are you trying to fool someone? You can predict the weather by looking at the earth and sky, but you don't really know what's going on right now.*



Last week's passage began with the words, "*my little group of children*" and conveyed Jesus' deep love for His children.

This week we make a 180° turn as we read, "*I came to set fire to the earth, and I wish it were already on fire!*" Woah. Can't we go back to 'my little children'? This week's text is one that challenges us and makes us look at where we stand in our faith. It is a difficult text. Let us pray.

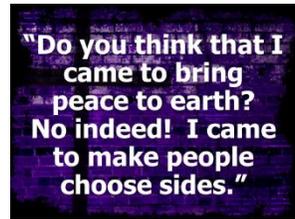
After Jesus makes this opening statement, He goes on to tell the disciples that He himself will be put to a hard test. Jesus knows what lies ahead on

the cross and maybe that is some of the urgency that drives today's passage. But if we look back over Jesus' three years of ministry, there were often times of testing and trial. It seems that in every other chapter in the New Testament we find the Pharisees, Sadducees, and others coming to question, to push, to test, and to argue with Jesus. Often we hear Jesus lamenting about how even the disciples, those closest to Him, just do not 'get it'. Over and over again they would say, 'Teacher, explain that to us'. Many of Jesus' other parables come in response to someone seeking worldly gain or a shortcut to eternal life. Just last month we heard the stories of the greedy man and the rich fool - two, who like us, struggled to live for Christ instead of earthly gain. We heard about Martha, who struggled with earthly cares.

Truth be told, when we look at the Old Testament, it is this same story line. The Old Testament tells the repeated story of God's people being faithful to God then spending a season pursuing idols or ways of life that are far from God. The people spent forty years wandering in the desert, were later in exile for hundreds of years, and even saw their city and temple destroyed not once but twice. Prophet after prophet after prophet brought the people back to God only to have them drift away once again. This cycle of being faithful and being disobedient is still one common to us today.

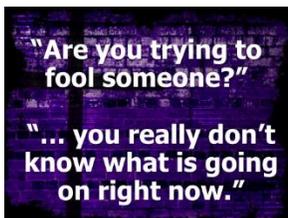
So as Jesus draws near to the end of His ministry, maybe we can see why He is starting to have this sense that people need to declare their choice, to pick

sides, and to stick with their choice. Jesus states, *“Do you think that I came to bring peace to earth? No indeed! I came to make people choose sides.”* He goes on to speak of families being divided, of sons standing against their fathers, of family members



turning against one another. This sounds harsh but Jesus knows that this is the reality. We have already seen examples of this in the Gospels. When called by Jesus, James and John get up out of the boat and leave their father sitting there by himself, left alone to run the family business. This is just one example of many where people must choose to leave the life they know to pursue the life God is calling them to. It can be a costly choice. As Peter stated in Mark 10, *“we have left everything and followed you.”* Most of us do not have to think too long to recall a time when faith cost us something or when faith caused division in our families or friendships.

Jesus then goes on to lament the people’s blindness to the real choice at hand. In Jesus’ day the people were very good at reading the weather. A breeze from the south came across the desert and brought with it warm weather. A breeze from the west came across the Mediterranean Sea and brought with it clouds and rain. As the people were nodding their heads in acceptance of Jesus’ praise of their weather forecasting abilities, He asks them, *“Are you trying to fool someone?”* and goes on to tell them that *“you really don’t know what is going on right now.”* In this quick reversal, they must have felt tricked or even trapped. Perhaps many walked away wondering just what Jesus meant or departed



self-righteously thinking that He must not have been talking to them. Surely Jesus was addressing someone else in the crowd.



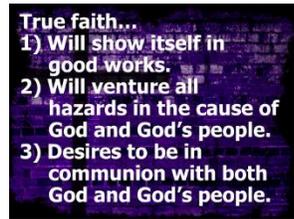
When we apply this scene to our times, we too can easily think that Jesus is talking to someone else, to some other congregation, to some other person who ‘thinks’ they are a Christian. But His words lead us to ask ourselves if we really understand what is going on and if we truly understand that God calls us to make a firm decision for our faith. As we wrestle with where we are in our faith journey, we find the crowning example of faith in the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we see what it means to really choose sides, to leave mother and brother and sister, to choose a relationship with God above all else. In Jesus, we see a man who endured persecution, suffering, and death on the cross to give us a testimony to what unyielding faith in God is like. Jesus swam against the stream of the status quo; shared meals with the outcast and persecuted of his day; stood with the poor, the downtrodden, the diseased, and the scorned; and, endured persecution from the people of His time. For us today, the question is, are we ready to choose to walk the path that Jesus walked?

The reading from Hebrews this week encourages us in our journey of faith. Hebrews 12, verses 1 and 2 reads, “*And we must be determined to run the race that is ahead of us. <sup>2</sup> We must keep our eyes on Jesus, who leads us and makes our faith complete.*” Without faith in Christ, the journey is impossible. Backing

up a bit, in Hebrews 11, we find the great list of the faithful. We read of Abel and Abraham and Moses. We read of these giants of the faith who set for us the example of what living a faithful life looks like. To me, these men are much like Jesus. I think, how can I ever live up to that? How can I ever come close to being as disciplined and as faithful as Moses or Abraham was, never mind being like Christ? Throughout the scriptures we also have examples of ones God chose who were such unlikely choices. In these examples, we can often find witness to our faith. But, many of them are people like David, the shepherd boy who slew a giant. He went on to become Israel's greatest king. And again, I think, who, me? But there are others.

Listed amongst the giants of the faith in Hebrews 11, we find Rahab. She was a Canaanite woman, an outsider, one who would be unlikely to have faith in the God of the Israelites. She was a prostitute, a common woman of the town. Yet she was also a believer. She knew that even though she lived a life of great sin, that God's love was greater. She knew that God's love and forgiveness could redeem even her. So she took the spies in, hid them from the soldiers, and helped them escape. She trusted in God and stepped out in faith. That faith saved Rahab and her family. A life of sin was no more. Rahab, like us, was a sinner. Rahab, like us, was just a normal, everyday person. And Rahab was ready to choose God over the life she knew. Are we ready to make the same choice?

Rahab's witness has much to offer us. I think we can distill the lessons that her story offers down to three tenets of faith. First, true faith will show itself in good works. Second, true faith will venture all hazards in the cause of God and God's people. Third, true faith desires to be in communion with both God and with God's people. In the living out of these truths, people of faith are willing to cast their lot with the other. They are willing to walk alongside them, no matter what the cost or the risk. In faith, followers of Christ are willing to run the race that God has laid out for them and are committed to keeping their eyes on Jesus, "*who leads us and makes our faith complete.*" Are you ready to choose this too?



Rahab may be someone we can better relate to and think, "If she could do it..." But Rahab and the others in Hebrews 11 are great examples of faithful people. The

reality is we are asked to follow Jesus, not to follow Rahab or Moses or Abraham or David. We are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus. So perhaps Jesus is speaking to us as well when he says, "*I came to make people choose sides.*" There are really only two choices. Jesus knew it. In Matthew 12:30 Jesus makes it clear, "*Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.*" Either we are all in or we are totally out. Either we are for Christ or we are against Christ.



This has always been the choice the people of God have had to make. It is one believers have always wrestled with. In the Old Testament, when the people were being drawn into the culture around them, we hear Joshua's strong declaration of who he will serve. In Joshua 24:15 we read, "*Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.*" Are you ready to choose as Joshua chose? Are you ready to swim against the current? Are you ready to make the same choice? Are you ready to choose?



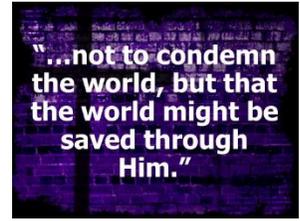
For all of us, it is a hard choice to make. The choice is hard because the voice of the world is loud and, out there, it is what dominates the conversation. The choice for Jesus is the choice to walk the narrow road, to choose the hard path. It is to swim against the current. It is to offer radical love. It is to serve those no one else even wants to be around. It is to walk beside another who is hurting or struggling to share their pain. But it is the road that has hope. It is the road that leads to peace and joy eternal. It is the road of love. It is the road that Christ walked.



*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."* These words of John 3:16 are so familiar. But verse

17 is our verse today. *“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”* This day, may we choose to follow Christ.

Are you ready?



Let us pray.