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Loaded Questions:
Did I Come to Bring Peace?
Luke 12: 49-53

Shalom! That is the one Hebrew word that probably everyone knows. Say it with me. Shalom! What does it mean? Peace! It is the common greeting in Israel. When you meet someone, you say, "Shalom." When you say goodbye to someone, you say, "Shalom." On the Sabbath, the special greeting is "Shabbat Shalom"... Sabbath peace. Shalom. Peace.

It's not hard to understand why the first and last word of the Jewish people would be "peace." They have lived in almost constant turmoil since God called Abraham. Psalm 122 invites us to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem." Shalom. And the Jewish people longed for the coming of a Messiah who would be the "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father... Prince of Peace." Shalom!

And when that Messiah was born, the angels trumpeted His arrival with these words: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests!" Shalom! Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount declared, "Blessed are the peacemakers!" He comforted His disciples with these words: "My peace I leave. My peace I give unto you." Often Jesus dismissed someone who had been healed with these words: "Go in peace!" Jesus' whole ministry seemed to be about proclaiming and offering peace to a troubled world. Even to the troubled physical world. Remember His words to the storm on the Sea of Galilee? "Peace. Be still!" Those wind-whipped waters went dead calm... just like the troubled soul of every person upon whom Jesus pronounced that wonderful word: Peace! Shalom! Who would expect less from the Prince of Peace? Which makes our *Loaded Question* for the morning very confusing and very troubling.

Read Luke 12: 49-53.

If you are visiting with us this morning, we are looking at the "loaded questions" of Jesus—the difficult, probing questions, the ones with an edge to them—that make us stop and think. And this morning's question certainly is one of those, isn't it? "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth?" Jesus asks. Well... yes! That whole angelic "Peace on earth, good will to all men" thing kind of put us in a mood. Yes! "Prince of Peace," "Go in peace," "My peace I leave with you," "Peace... be still." Yes, we kind of thought that you did come to bring peace on earth, Jesus.

But that's not the answer to His loaded question. His answer is very disturbing. "No, I come to bring division. Families will be turned against each other because of me."

I chose the Luke text because Jesus puts it as a question. But in Matthew's parallel passage, Jesus is even more emphatic: (10:34)

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Do we have a family of five or more here this morning? Would you stand up? Here you are... in church together as a family. Presumably you are doing this because you think it is a good thing; an important way to strengthen your family and draw you closer together. Then you hear these words from Jesus. Surely this must be upsetting to you. You two, turn and face this way. You three, face the other direction. This is what Jesus says He is going to do? Turn you against each other? Mom, do you want to be turned against your daughter? Dad, want your son to reject you? You know what I would recommend to your family? Pick up your things... run for the doors! And don't stop! This Jesus sounds like a radical!

When we read these words, it sounds more like Islam than Christianity, doesn't it? More like Mohammad than Jesus. "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." Jihad? Is that Jesus' real agenda? And yet, when Peter pulled a sword and lopped off the ear of one of the attackers in Gethsemane, what were Jesus' words? "Put away the sword. He who lives by the sword, dies by the sword."

So, which is it, Jesus? Peace or the sword? Unity or division? Families brought together or families torn apart? Answer? Yes! Yes, to both. Does Jesus love families and want to bring them together? Of course He does! Again and again, Jesus affirmed marriage, parenthood, children—He affirmed the essential role of the family as the God-ordained centerpiece of society. Jesus isn't saying here that He wants to bring division, that He wants to turn family members against each other... But He is saying that when someone decides to follow Him, it has the potential of upending some of their closest relationships. The coming of Jesus into a life and into a family can unsettle things.

My buddy Rick Murray received Christ in 1971. Excitedly, he went to his father and said, "Hey dad, I just became a Christian." His father's response? "What a crock of _____!" You, fill in the blank. Here was the most important decision that Rick had ever made—a decision that would mark and shape his life forever—and

the man he most loved and respected called that decision a pile of poo. "Do you think that I came to bring peace?"

One of the young girls that accepted Christ on our Mexico trip has actually been interested in Jesus for a while. But she was afraid to give her life to Christ because her family doesn't go to church and she thought it would cause trouble at home. "Do you think that I came to bring peace?"

Dave and Karen Eubank minister in Burma where Christianity is in the minority and where the price of following Christ can be high. He recently sent this report:

"...one of our team members, Hser Wah (which means Sweet White) told us he wanted to be baptized so that if he was killed he would know where his soul would go. We baptized him in a stream right before he had to cross a road patrolled by the Burma Amy on which many have been killed. His parents told him they were animist and were against his being baptized. He told us that he loved his parents and prayed for them, but he had to be a follower of Jesus.

Another story is of our Shan team leader Sai Nawng, whom I baptized in our pond in Chaing Mai. He is the only Christian in his family and one of the few of the Shan tribe. Some [from the Shan tribe] told Sai Nawng that he is not a real Shan anymore because he is now a Christian. They told him they used the Bible for toilet paper and that they did not want the gospel or anything Christian around."

And if you think such things happen only in far-flung lands, Cyndi and I know a girl who, when she received Jesus, was kicked out of her family. Right here in little old Gig Harbor. "Do you think that I came to bring peace?"

Last Sunday, I threw in an ad lib during my sermon that I almost regretted. I asked how many had used one of the questions we had been studying in a spiritual conversation with a friend. Honestly, I expected hundreds of hands to be raised. After all, how hard are the questions we had been dealing with? "Who are you? How are you, really? What's wrong? What are you afraid of?" If you can't ask those questions... So I was very surprised when less than a hundred hands went up. And, honestly, I was upset. This is the Year of Good News—the year of learning how to share our living faith in Jesus with others. But if we are really not willing to open our mouths and have even the simplest of conversations with a friend, there won't be any good news coming out of this place.

After I got over being mad, I asked myself, "Why?" Why would someone find it so hard to begin to have spiritual conversations with people they care about? It seems to me that there are four possible reasons.

- I don't believe. (I think this stuff is a fairy tale. One woman in our *Christianity Explored* class called it 'balderdash'...but she is still coming! Good for her.)
- I don't care. (I believe in Jesus but there's nobody I really care enough about to take the trouble to tell them about him.)
- I don't know. (I believe in Jesus but I don't know enough to explain what I believe without messing up.)

But there is another reason that some of us are not sharing our faith: I'm afraid. I'm afraid that if I talk about Jesus with my family or friends, I'm going to cause trouble. Muddy the waters. Rock the boat. Stir things up. One of the most important values in a family system is equilibrium. Even when things aren't the way we'd like them to be, we are so afraid of roiling the waters, we will endure destructive behavior because miserable equilibrium is safer than healthy unrest. And if there is anything that has the potential of messing up equilibrium in our relationships, religion can certainly do the trick. You want to talk about what Jesus has done for you, but you are afraid that when you bring it up, that precious equilibrium will be destroyed. Like this. (Baking soda in vinegar.)

If, in this Year of Good News, you still haven't had the courage to share your faith in Jesus, is it possible that this is the reason why? It's not that you don't believe; you do! It's not that you don't care; you do! It's not that you don't know; you could find the words to say if you wanted to. No, it's because you are afraid that if you do the relationships that matter most to you might be thrown into upheaval. You are afraid of being found guilty of what, for some families, is the worst crime of all: Disturbing the peace!

And you know what? You might! That's exactly what Jesus is saying. He's not saying, "I want you to go looking for a fight! I want you to have a chip on your shoulder and stir up trouble in my name whenever you get the chance." No, the last thing we need is another Christian with a chip on his shoulder. But He is saying something very hard: there is no relationship on this earth, however precious, that is more important than your relationship with Him. If you are a genuine follower of Jesus, every other relationship in your life will be defined and grounded in your relationship with Him. And sometimes, this will mean that those whom you love will reject your faith—and they might even reject you.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He did come to bring peace, but not bumper sticker peace. He came to bring real shalom. Peace with God. Peace with ourselves. Peace with each other. Peace with our broken past and our uncertain future. The equilibrium that this world is desperate to preserve with words like "tolerance" is a counterfeit peace that comes from avoiding the truth about who we are, what we have done and how helpless we are to fix it. Jesus says, "I came to stir things up. I came to speak the truth. I came to help you face your sinful reality...so that I can save you from it."

Sometimes, that means taking a risk and speaking the truth to those we love even though we are terrified that it might turn them against us. And sometimes it will. That's the honest warning that Jesus offers here. But sometimes—because we dare to speak—the upset will lead to real peace. Sometimes we must muddy the waters.

Remember Rick Murray's dad? He thought this Jesus stuff was a pile of ca-ca. 13 years later he gave his life to Christ and is now an elder in his church. And that girl who was afraid to tell her family because they don't go to church? The next Sunday, they were in church with her. And Sai Nawng, the man that Dave Eubank baptized? He gently asked his animist father to remove all the spirit items from their home. And he did. And now, because of his witness, four other of his Shan team mates are interested in coming to Christ.

You know, there is one bumper sticker that I do like. Have you seen this one? "Know Christ—Know Peace. No Christ—No Peace."

Most people don't want to rock the boat with friends or family. And many of us who love Jesus are reluctant to tell others about Him because we are afraid it will upset things. It might. But one of the loaded questions every one of us must answer for ourselves is this: "Do I love this person enough that I'm willing to risk upsetting the equilibrium for the sake of their eternal soul? Will I trade a false and temporary peace for the real thing—the peace that only Jesus can offer?" How you answer that question will determine whether you will ever share the good news of Jesus with anyone.

Some here have to decide whether Jesus is worth it for themselves. Others, whether He is worth it for those closest to them. Pray, think, listen, obey.

Has the time come for you to stir things up? To take a stand for Jesus that might mess with the equilibrium?

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
 1. "Do you think that I came to bring peace?" How would you respond to that question from Jesus? Do you find his images disturbing? What do you think he means by this?
 2. When Mark talks about our reluctance to disturb equilibrium, even for the sake of truth, does that make sense in your own life? Can you give examples?
 3. Does the charge of "Disturbing the Peace" need to be leveled against you in some area of your life? What is Jesus asking you to "disturb?"