

Aug. 18, 2019 Welcome Sunday
Chapel of the Resurrection
Preacher: Deaconess Kristin Lewis, Interim Campus Minister

Gospel: Luke 12:49-56

The Holy Gospel according to Luke:

[Jesus said:] ⁴⁹“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵²From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³they 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.”

⁵⁴He 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. ⁵⁵And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. ⁵⁶You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

This is the gospel of the Lord.

And so, let’s begin with Welcome Sunday, where we hear a challenging word from Jesus that we are called to wrestle with. Called to understand what Jesus might be calling us to in this

world. And as a mother of three children, I hope this text isn't saying, it's totally fine that your kids fight all the time! That's my plan. I think it goes much deeper. You see, you're gonna come to this place, and be wrestling with the truth that God is placing in your lives. We like to say around here that this is a place where Athens and Jerusalem meet. Right where the way of the world and the way of the Church come together, not in conflict, but in deep conversation. There was recently floating through social media an article that talked about one of the worst things that maybe happened in society, was the fact that we started saying, "can't talk about church and religion. You can't talk about politics, they're too controversial." And so what's happened is that much of society, we either don't talk at all, or we blast each other anonymously. Either via sound bytes or tweets. Well, welcome to a place that we hope will be different, a place where we hope you will come and engage.

In Core this year students will be thinking deeply about empathy and how is it that we listen to one another? How is it, that we engage with one another? For those who are just beginning their time here at Valparaiso University I'm gonna break it to you: people believe differently when they are here. It might be your roommate, it might be your RA, it might even be your Peer Minister, it might be you professor. So much of our world says that we are supposed to close ourselves off, to make sure they know that they're wrong and we know we're right, and break off that relationship. Which is in some ways that some people want to stay away from the text that talks about division. Don't we have enough of that already? One of my seminary professors liked to always point out that Jesus wasn't crucified because he was nice.

You see, Jesus came to speak truth into systems that said some people didn't have value. To speak truths into systems that said some people didn't belong. To speak truths into systems that took away the image of God in our neighbors. Those that had the systems in place, those that

had the power and privilege liked how things were working out. And yet He came to say that is not where our value comes from. You see in ancient times your value was deeply tied to your family; your family's value, your family's place and your family's lineage. That Jesus came and said you are to love and care for the widow and the orphan, who have no status. You are here to stand up and touch the untouchable even if your family will rebuke you. You are here to engage and become my disciple, which means picking up your cross, engaging things that are challenging and difficult and following me. It's easy to say, "that's how things were in Jesus' time." That it's true today.

Many of you that are students at Valparaiso University come with high marks on your grade books. You come with high accomplishments on your resume and application. You come being expected to achieve. And so today, on Welcome Sunday, I say that's not the most important. We are reminded in this Gospel text that first and foremost is that you might be a child of God. That your value doesn't come from your family's lineage, from the status you carry, from the extracurricular group that you are connected to. That first and foremost your identity comes as a child of God. That even when you trip and stumble and screw up that Jesus needs you there. Which you might be able to confess that which is weighing you down and hear words of grace and forgiveness. Today we have the opportunity as we are deconstructed, deconstructed from the systems of the world that take away life. Deconstructed from the systems that tell us what our status is. And we experience not a cafeteria at certain high schools where people sit at tables, and you better not cross, but a table where all are welcome. Where all are welcome to come and receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ. To come and be reconstructed. To be remembered into a body of Christ being sent out to this world, that we might experience life in the kingdom in breaking.

Life where we are seen as a bearer of the image of God. Life where we get to listen deeply to one another and better understand who God is. Life where we lean in with curiosity and wonder, but also to be invited to look deeply into the systems that are at play. You see, Jesus isn't commenting on our gift of meteorology which we celebrate here at VU. When He talks about our ability to see the weather and even then we know it's not always true. Right? We can get caught in a rainstorm in two seconds. But it's really easy to operate in systems, to go about our own business. Never looking to our neighbor, never listening to one another and seeing systems of oppression that might reside. In our world, in our community, in our universities, and maybe even in our families.

Where are we called to name that which is taking away from life? Which is not part of the vision of the Kingdom of God that we are called to? It's hard to hear Jesus say, 'I didn't come for peace.' But you see, sometimes we think that peace means the absence of any conflict. It's better to just not talk about things. Not speak about those things we are wrestling with. Not speak up when we see a friend impacted by a racist or sexist statement.

You see the challenge sometimes of being faithful, dear friends, is it means truly following Jesus. Into those broken places in our world and crying out for God's kingdom in that place. Martin Luther King Jr., when he was in prison in Birmingham, he wrote a letter to clergy. And one of those things he wrote in that letter was, "I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council-er or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice."

Today I welcome you to a community of faith which tries to strive to be a place where peace is about justice. About empathy. About listening to one another deeply with wonder and curiosity. That seeks first to seek Christ in their neighbor.

Dear friends, it's not always comfortable. But through this work, where I strive to see Jesus in you, others might strive to see Jesus in me. And remind me that when I think I have no value, because the paper I wrote came back with the letter "C" on it, or I'm failing a class, or I didn't get in to the club I wanted, that my value is as a child of God. God has a purpose for me. And my prayer is that during your time here, you might hear that call on your heart and in your mind. And go out with the fire of the Holy Spirit, giving you the courage to be a disciple. Amen.