



Divided We...Unite?

Pastor John Klawiter

August 14, 2022

Tenth Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 12:49-56

Grace and peace to you my siblings in faith,

One of our members posted this week on social media a meme that read **“I don’t know who needs to hear this, but... you have to stop trying so hard to sit at the table that Jesus is trying to flip over.”**

You know, we want to sit at those tables of authority and privilege, but Jesus came into this world to implore the world that this is not the goal. Sometimes, we need to change our ways.

So then one of her friends made a comment.

She innocently posted **“I don’t think Jesus would flip over the table, I think he’d politely say it was nice talking to you and move on to the next person or group.”**

That sounds like what we expect Jesus to do, right?

But our member replied **“he literally flipped a table in the Bible.”**

The friend had no idea. She didn’t get defensive, she honestly named that **“wow, I haven’t actually read the Bible as I’m not super religious, but that’s very interesting.”**

The anger of Jesus is not something we expect.

Neither is the words that come out of his mouth in today’s reading.

Families will be divided? Jesus, do you MEAN what you’re saying here?

It’s almost as if we’ve taken him too literally. If there’s one thing we understand, it’s divisions.

Do you know how many Lutheran denominations are there in North America?

Any guesses?



ELCA, Missouri Synod, Wisconsin synod... but also many smaller ones, break-off synods from larger synods, my uncle is a pastor in the NALC... **to the tune of 39.**

That's JUST Lutheran synods, think about that!

What about Christian denominations around the world?

Venture a guess?

45,000

Were you close? That's only Christians, and not churches, not even synods... these are separate, unique divisions within a Christian understanding of Jesus.

Why so many? A Professor emeritus of church history at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom said **"There's never been a united Christianity."**

Perhaps the one Biblical thing all of us Christians are united on is when Jesus said **"Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?**

No, I tell you, but rather division!"

We are divided over many things... and ironically, JESUS is one of the most dividing issues WITHIN followers of Jesus!

Can you even process how ridiculous that should be to us?

Why is that? Why are there so many Christian understandings?

There are many different theological interpretations about who Jesus is and what he stands for. Many churches have spun off based of ethnic or cultural identity. Many churches allow for certain openness on who can lead, but stop short at how far they'll go... and love to critique their neighbors for their heretical understanding of the Bible.

It's exhausting to keep up with who is in, who is out, and who am I allowed to play with in the sandbox.

One of my favorite professors in seminary, David Lose, said "history is written backwards; sermons are written forward."

Think about that... history is told from this moment, and then working backwards. What happened?

Sermons, on the other hand, point us forward. We look at the Biblical texts, we look at the world around us, we see what we've done and left undone... and know that, because of our baptism—the same baptism that Jesus speaks about in today's reading—that through our baptism, ALL of our sins are forgiven (like the kids message).



We are given a blank slate. New day. You are forgiven. Go, into the world, free to be who God has created you to be. Where are we going forward?

It's challenging when we have a different understanding than other Christians, isn't it?

We have divisions over when and who can be baptized. And Communion—all are welcome to our table today, but that's not the case for me if I go elsewhere.

Is THAT what Jesus meant by division???

We are full communion partners with 6 different church bodies. Notice that none of them are other Lutherans.

Many Christians, including the majority of Lutheran denominations, do not ordain women. Think about that. Our tradition is so RICH because of the voices of female leaders. Deacon Nina. This church raised up female pastors, like Marlene Elmstrom. Our bishop is Patricia Lull and the leader of the entire ELCA is Bishop Elizabeth Eaton.

Many Christians would completely discard our tradition due to our leadership of women.

If someone said, we are united in Christ... but they said we all had to agree to the same standards, would you be willing to let that one go?

I wouldn't. No matter your age, gender, sexual identity, God created you. Why wouldn't God create any one of these siblings to bring the word? Can't I learn about Jesus from different voices and life perspectives?

Thinking about all this division can lead to more anxiety, know what I mean?

Our own denomination, the ELCA, is no stranger to divisions, splits, controversies. But, I'm grateful that this is where I am. It's where I belong. We say all are welcome and mean it—in our pulpits, in our pews, at the baptismal font and especially at this table, where Jesus offers us unconditional love through the grace secured on the cross and through an empty tomb 3 days later.

What does that say about us?

We aren't perfect. We don't all agree on every point of theology, of course.

Last Sunday, we wrote down the things on our heart—where our treasure is, there our heart is also.

These verses were right before what we heard today. So think about this. What we treasure and spend our money on and invest our time, that's where our heart is.



Jesus is making a distinction. You can't follow me and then have idols that you care more about.

We can't follow Jesus but trample on our neighbors to get ahead in life.

We can't follow Jesus if the only thing we care about is ourselves. Jesus knows that this will divide families, communities, congregations.

Jesus arrived with a powerful message. He didn't say "come, follow me and we'll have peace, love, and harmony."

He says love your neighbors as yourself by being their servant and giving your life for a friend. He tells parables where the person who cares for their enemy is the hero. He points out the obvious flaw of valuing our money over our faith... these are not just cool stories.

He's inviting us into a new way of living.

We will never be united. Not in my lifetime, not in my kids. But that doesn't speak at all about the value of hope.

I have hope that when I care for my family, my wife, my neighbor, my friend, my first time visitor to Faith, my fellow driver who doesn't use turn signals and drives too fast, my peers who lead at churches with different beliefs than ours, my stranger who always seems to make the wrong life choices and is in need of help... it's my hope that I'll treat them faithfully.

Not based on their beliefs. Not based on their faith or lack of it. Not based on their divisions. Not based on MY divisions.

I am accountable to my own baptismal identity. It's all I can control.

Is God asking me to love THAT neighbor? We can love our neighbor and still be divided. We can love and still call out our sibling in faith that is not treating others with love.

By agreeing to be part of this church and this faith, we are agreeing that what unites us is a common love. God's love. God's love for us and this world. We are called to unite in sharing that love with the world. Amen.