

**Meditation ~ August 8, 2010**  
**Luke 12:49-56: Psalm 82**

The scripture reading for this morning has long been one of my least favorites. Maybe that's because, taken at face value, it seems to speak against all we would like to believe about Jesus. We would prefer to have a positive picture of him as one who extends himself as a "bridge over troubled waters"—not a stirrer of peaceful waters into turbulence. But, most likely, his message and new way of viewing God and doing religion, might not have gained any traction had it not disturbed people and even stirred them up to react against one another. For, it is often in and through conflict that we finally come to an understanding of another person's, or group of people's, point of view.

If we do battle with someone, without losing respect for that person, when we calm down a bit, a light might just dawn in the inner recesses of our brains causing us to reconsider the problem and try to develop an understanding of an issue or position. If we just do battle and turn away, we gain nothing. Instead, we do need to rehash where it is we are coming from and understand that another may have a perfectly valid reason for defending an idea or project we think has no value. Through locking horns our lives may become enriched and we might discover a way to become a bridge between old ways and those that are new.

Perhaps, Jesus was hoping to stir people up and make them think about the way they had practiced religion in the past compared with the new light he had come to bring. This would cause disruption in families full of people secure in traditional forms of doing things; people who felt safe being bound by the letter of the law instead of looking for the spirit within it.

Sometimes, this same kind of disruption occurs in families today when a member takes off in a different faith direction. Families that have attended the same church for years, become disturbed by a child who decides that their tried and true way is no longer valid for him or her. People change and the need to grow and explore other ways of doing things is common to our human condition.

In our own sacrament of baptism we ask that a child be raised in our tradition until he or she makes his or her "own choice of faith in God." When this choice is made most families accept it. Problems arise when a family member takes off in another direction and then proceeds to tell the family of origin how much better the new way is compared to theirs; that they are wrong in the way they have chosen and that they need to correct the error of their ways.

I have seen this happen a few times. When such a disruption occurs, I explain to the family that the member who has found a new angle on their old faith is only trying to save them. In one instance, family gatherings became very difficult because the youngest daughter was always busy trying to tell the rest of the family that they were not following the "true way" and that they would all be damned. This young woman used to sing on occasion in the family's home church, one I was serving, and she always used her songs to sell her message. I told anyone who had a problem with this, that we all have our own pathways we follow in finding God in our lives. Karen had chosen the one that was right for her. There was no use disputing it—it would get them nowhere. People

who become overzealous in their faith often cannot hear anyone else—or, perhaps, will not. Eventually things might calm down, as they did for Karen and her family. She backed off from preaching every time they gathered.

Then there was a young man who had moved to California. He had been down on his luck and had been taken in by a “Christian group.” His father came to talk to me after he had heard from his son and been told that he was no longer his father, the man leading this new religious group was. His father traveled out to California to see just what was going on and returned to tell me that he believed that his son had become a member of a cult. And, he had. There was no way to extricate this young man from this group. The father endured long phone calls telling him that he was wrong and that the son had found the one, true way. I told his father to stop beating himself up over this and to tell his son that he was pleased he had found his spiritual pathway. He should also tell his son, that he, too, had found his way and hoped his child would honor it. He did and things calmed down.

I am sure Jesus did not come to drive such a sword into the heart of a father who was and is a true believer. I am equally sure there are many who use our reading as a way to validate some of their tactics in gaining followers.

Jesus, most likely, wanted people to stop and think about his message and mission; to open their eyes and see if there was a better way, and to understand that there might be problems that would spring up if they chose to follow him. He wanted people to see what was going on in the world around them and then to take steps to find that better way. This would cause them to appear to be out of step with tradition and might even lead to their persecution. His message was an urgent one—he believed the end was very near and whatever methods were needed to bring as many people as possible to an understanding of this new way were to be used even if they caused great upset.

His words were prophetic. After his death and resurrection the Christians who came after him were persecuted and reviled. But, through it all they remained true and made others pause and think about their strength and devotion.

We live in different times and in a place where we are free to practice our religion, no matter what form it may take. We must be grateful for this. We don’t feel the same urgency—we have been around for almost 2000 years since his death. And, yet we are called to stand fast in our faith and discover ways of taking the good news to those who have ears and may hear it. The most effective way to do this lies in the way we lead our lives—to be good, solid examples to those around us. There is so much confusion and dissension in our world that in our time it is of more value for us to find the ways to become bridges over waters that are in turmoil than to be divisive. Doing this we will help ensure that our faith will continue to move forward through the ages toward the goal Jesus had in mind all along, that of peace and love.

*-- Amen*