

SOME SIMPLE QUESTIONS ABOUT A COMPLICATED PASSAGE

Luke 12:49-56 (Proper 15C)

- 1. Have you ever seen this passage quoted on a flowery plaque or refrigerator magnet?*
- 2. Where exactly does this appear in Luke's Gospel?*
- 3. Jesus is literally going places in Luke. Where is his destination? What happens when he gets there?*
- 4. What do you think Jesus means when he references "fire" in this passage?*
- 5. Jesus talks about the "stress" he's under. Do you think he's actually "stressed out"?*
- 6. Didn't Jesus come to "bring peace to the earth"? Whatever happened to the "peace which passes all understanding"?*
- 7. So this is why I don't get along with my in-laws?*
- 8. The passage concludes with Jesus saying, "You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?" How might we interpret our own "present time" in light of this passage?*

Suggested answers on the following page.

It's OK to peek - or not!

Some answers to ponder . . .

1.Nope.

2. Chapter 12: 49-56 comes well into Luke's famous travelogue which begins at 9:51 (Jesus "set his face toward Jerusalem") through the triumphal entry at 19:38 (what we commemorate as Palm Sunday). This takes up about a third of Luke's gospel!

3. Luke devotes a lot of space to the journey to Jerusalem – it builds drama and gives a sense of urgency to Jesus' teaching. It provides the WHY behind what Jesus says and does along the way. Clearly all this build-up is not because Jesus is going to Jerusalem for an idyllic stroll.

Once in Jerusalem, things escalate quickly as the crowds (folks like **us**) go from shouting "Hosanna!" to "Crucify him!" at Jesus. He shares a sacred meal with his friends, and is arrested, tried, tortured and dies on the Cross. Three days later some female followers venture forth to find his tomb empty. Also in Jerusalem, the disciples regroup and encounter the risen Lord, who sends them out with a blessing. Each of these moments present a *krisis* (Greek) – a time of decision. Making a decision means taking a stand that can lead to "division" and sometimes conflict – not for its own sake, but for a greater purpose of ultimate allegiance. There's no greater decision than deciding whether (or not) to follow God in Christ Jesus.

4. Fire can mean destruction – perhaps like a phoenix rising out of the ashes. Fire also denotes a purifying/clarifying source: Burnishing down to a thing's essence. Fire is used in Scripture as an image for winnowing out the weeds from the chaff. In Hebrew Scripture, the people Israel are led to the Promised Land by a pillar of fire. Later, in his companion Book of Acts, Luke uses the imagery of "tongues of fire" to describe the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Colloquially, fire indicates fervor or passion. In the context of this passage, fire is coupled with baptism – as in "baptism by fire." Perhaps Jesus intends many layers of meaning when he references fire.

5. Jesus is fully human and fully divine. But here the mention of "stress" appears to be more like carrying the burden or yoke of a particular mission. Rather than

“stressed out” Jesus seems single-minded in his determination to “accomplish” his work.

6. Christ Jesus is our “peace” (Ephesians 2: 14) but NOT a pushover! Jesus draws a line in the sand – for justice, for mercy, for healing love. Jesus stands with the most vulnerable and “the least” -- children, the sick, the powerless. *In him there are no outcasts.* Jesus creates a *krisis* (see #3 above) forcing us to decide whether or not to follow him. Whether or not to be like him. To be or not to be his hands and heart and voice in this world God so loves. Making the choice to follow Jesus may not always lead to a “peaceful” life, but it will yield that “peace which passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) which sustained our namesake Paul after he chose to follow Jesus and ended up in a Roman prison.

7. Not so easy! This is not a license to be unpleasant, but a call to take a stand for and with Jesus. You don’t spread love by being hateful any more than you call out a bully by being a bully. Act and advocate with integrity – that, by the grace of God, your inner life is *integrated* into everything you do and say in the outer world. “Speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). Then let the chips fall where they may.

8. Continue to reflect upon this passage in the week ahead. Follow the news of the day with it in mind. Pray. Listen. Take courage. You’ll find places where Jesus invites you to take a stand with him.

Is there a situation in your family or work where you can model that it’s possible to disagree – without being disagreeable?

Or maybe you’ll be inspired to take a stand on behalf of God’s green earth by eating more local and less meat?

On this week leading up to the 400th anniversary of enslaved Africans being brought to the Americas, can we come to terms with the advantages and privileges some of us have for no other reason than being born white?

Taking a stand for and with Jesus, how do you interpret the “present time”?

