Luke 12:49-50 49“I came to throw fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already ignited. 50But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is finished!

Fire. Some of you are members or have been members of our volunteer fire department here in Mayville and because of that job I am sure you could tell us a lot about fire. There is very little that is as horrifying or terrifying as a raging, out of control fire. I think about the fire that destroyed the garage next to my house and how it burnt. At the time, I can tell you my concern was that if the fire department didn’t get there on time then the house would catch fire and after that, who knows what would have burned. The heat was absolutely intense. In such a situation it takes hard work and plenty of water to put a fire out.

I mention fire because our text does. What we find in our text is Jesus using a common figure of speech, something called a metaphor. A metaphor is a figure of speech which implies a comparison between the term used and the idea or object one wishes to express. In this particular case, Jesus refers to the work he will do, the benefits he will bring, yes, even the future of the Christian Church. The metaphor that he uses is fire!

That may not make a lot of sense to you, especially because in this day we view fire as a horrible destroyer, as something that we generally want nothing to do with. Yet let me remind you of how the people in Jesus’ day viewed fire.

You need to know that in Jesus’ day to have fire was to have life. You cooked in fire. Fire provided you with heat. Fire was even the very source of your light. Think about this, everyone could have fire. Fact is, fire is not something that easily lends itself to buying and selling because generally speaking anyone with a little ingenuity could start a fire or find a way to provide for fire. In essence, fire is kind of a free commodity.

There is more. Fire can be used as a weapon to defend or to destroy. A fire burning at night would not only discourage thieves, but also keep away the wild animals. In the case of attack, one could throw fire, either torches or hot coals, in order to defend your life. And if we grasp how fire can be used to defend, then I hardly think I need to mention how fire could be used to attack and destroy.

Fire was important to the people of Jesus’ day. Let’s you and I explore this saying of Jesus further so that we come to understand what He would have us know. Our theme is: **THE FIRE OF GOD.**

What is Jesus talking about when he speaks of the fire that he brings? That’s a good question to ask and in truth, we need to carefully explore all that Jesus says of this fire to come to a satisfactory answer. Let’s begin simply by looking at the verses before us. Jesus says, **“I came to throw fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already ignited.”**

If there is one thing that this passage tells us it is that Jesus is the one who is bringing the fire. Notice that the verbs state that this fire is the reason he came and this fire is what Jesus intends to throw. What is most interesting, is to note that Jesus is already at the end of his second year of ministry yet his words here tell us that he has not yet thrown the fire.

Jesus as important is the next line of our text. Jesus expresses the thought, **“And how I wish it were already ignited.”** It is clear that the fire is yet to come, yes, the fire is a future event and we see that Jesus is anxious, even more, Jesus desires and wishes that the fire were already lit. What we have learned so far is that Jesus is the bringer of the fire and that the fire is going to be kindled in the future. We also learn that the fire is something that Jesus wants to have happen, because it is clear from his tone that Jesus believes the fire will be for good and benefit. So, let’s just explore a few more passages of Scripture to get a better grasp of what Jesus is talking about.

What other passages speak of fire? We could go to the five instances in the O.T. where fire was used by God in acts of divine judgment. For example, think of Nadab and Abihu. Think of Elijah and his offering before the prophets of Baal. In that same regard consider what Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8. **“Certainly, it is right for God to repay trouble to those who trouble you, and to give relief to you, who are troubled along with us. When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his powerful angels, he will exercise vengeance in flaming fire on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”**

Consider also 2 Peter 3:10, a passage that speaks of the Judgment Day of the Lord. Although you don’t hear the term “fire” it is clear the idea is there. **“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will pass away with a roar, the elements will be dissolved as they burn with great heat, and the earth and what was done on it will be burned up.”** All of this makes us ask: “Could it be possible that the fire Jesus speaks of is a fire that is connected with the judgment of God?

Before we answer that, perhaps we should also consider numerous times that fire is spoken of in the Scripture as a purifier and cleaner. For instance in Malachi 3:2 we read in connection with the promised Messiah: **“But who can endure the day when he comes? Who will remain standing when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire, like a launderer’s bleach!”**

Consider what 1 Corinthians 3:12-13 says. **“But if anyone is building on this foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, each person’s work will become evident. The Day will make it plain, because it is going to be revealed in fire, and the fire will test each person’s work to show what sort of work it is.”** Could the fire of Jesus be something that will happen that will purify before God?

Wait, one more thing before we try and give answer to what Jesus means by the fire he will throw. You realize that throughout the Scriptures fire is also something that has represented the Divine Presence and Power of God? Psalm 97:3 says, **“Fire goes out in front of him. It burns up his foes all around him.”** In the Book of Exodus how is God revealed to Moses? That’s right, a burning bush that was not consumed. What lead the people of Israel in their wilderness travels? It was called a **“pillar of cloud”** by day but at night it was called a **“pillar of fire.”** Or how is it that God made the presence of his Holy Spirit known on Pentecost? Yep, tongues of fire that came to rest on every disciples’ head.

What of the words of Hebrews 12:28-29? **“Therefore, since we are going to receive an unshakeable kingdom, let us be thankful. This is how we serve God in an acceptable way, with reverence and awe. For our God is a consuming fire.”** Could it be that Jesus was simply referring to something that would happen that would clearly reveal the divine presence and power of God?

What I have done is given you God’s evidence of what this fire Jesus speaks of could be. Three things it could be. Which is it? Might I suggest that you consider all three? Might I suggest that there was an event in the life of Jesus that not only *revealed the judgment of God* but *served as a purifier of men* and at the same time *revealed the divine presence and power of God*? That event is the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus suffered that God might condemn all the sin of the world in his Son. The very justice and judgment of God was carried out on the cross as Jesus took upon himself God’s anger against sin. Even more, Jesus’ suffering on the cross was and is for the purification of men. Through his suffering and death, Jesus was paying for our sins and we are proclaimed forgiven of sin through Jesus. Yep, our sins are forgotten, they are gone, we are considered through faith to be pure and holy in the eyes of God because of Jesus Christ.

And then in a wonderful declaration of triumph Jesus rose from the dead. It was the one act that set him apart from the rest of mankind. Jesus was and is the only one to have died, to have been buried and to have risen from the dead on his own power. As Scripture so aptly declares: **“This gospel is about his Son…who in the spirit of holiness was declared to be God’s powerful Son by his resurrection from the dead.”**

There is no doubt in my mind that Jesus in our text was speaking of his Passion and the wonderful message that act would have for the world. It is a message of love, of salvation, and a message of a God who is full of mercy for a world that is rotten with sin. The fire of God is the message, the act and the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation. And yes, Jesus brought it!

Of course, I have some bad news for you. Don’t expect that the people of the world are going to be thrilled with this wonderful message of Jesus’ salvation through faith by grace alone. I tell you, mark well what Jesus says in the latter part of our text, **“Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.”**

The fire that Jesus brings, the wonder and joy of God’s gift of salvation through Jesus, this fire is not going to bring peace to this world, or should I say to those of this world. It is true, it will bring peace to those who believe. It brings a spiritual peace, a peace not of this world, a peace that has the hope and certainty of eternal life. This spiritual peace the world will not understand. To the world, this spiritual peace of God is nothing more than utter foolishness, because the world is only concerned with what is going on here, not with the things of God.

So what can you expect, YOU, a Christian living in a world that is really Satan’s playground? You can expect division. Jesus is quite blunt about it, “**52Yes, from now on there will be five divided in one household: 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 her mother-in-law.”** God’s Word clearly tells you that Jesus and his truth, Jesus and his salvation, Jesus and all that he stands for will be something that will divide families.

You know what I am talking about. How many of you sitting here this day have family members that sorely need the wonder and joy of God’s love in Jesus? How many of your family didn’t think Jesus important enough to be in church for? How many in your family are already showing signs that Jesus isn’t their way, truth and life? Yet, you are afraid to speak to them about God’s Word because of the horrid fight it will cause. They will accuse you, “You think you are so right!” They will make you feel bad because you dared to speak of Jesus and his love, of Jesus and being in church to hear of his love. You will be called a holy roller, a hypocrite, a fool, a know-it-all…all at the same time. You know this happens. I know this happens. So why are you surprised? Jesus tells us point blank it is going to happen just because of his name and truth.

The only thing I can say is “Don’t stop confessing Jesus. Don’t stop worshipping Jesus, regularly, you know, like every week, hey, how about every day! Don’t stop believing in Jesus because of what everyone else says. Stand up for Jesus, maybe better yet, stand up for your faith in Jesus. Tell them about Jesus and when they get all upset, smile and walk away knowing that you just proved Jesus to be absolutely right.

Most important, recognize that this wonderful gift of salvation, this wonderful message of God that Jesus has done it all for the world, yes, for you and for me, recognize that this salvation is yours and mine. It is ours because Jesus won it for us. Rejoice in that. Be filled with the peace of God that this world doesn’t understand. Be filled with Jesus because Jesus is what it is all about. You and I have this fire of God, this truth of eternal life and salvation of and from Jesus. May your heart burn with its message. Amen.