

**Suum Cuique** (*soo-oom kooi-kwe*)

**Luke 12:49-59**

READ Luke 12:49-59

When you read that passage, you want to stop and catch your breath. There are some hard, very direct messages in there. Jesus is not asking anyone to read between the lines or do some deep theological research or consult some authoritative sources for interpretation. He is asking us to just pay attention. Let's get right to it.

First, Jesus uses the imagery of fire to describe the heart of his mission on earth. His immediate audience of people of Jewish heritage would have generally associated fire with God's judgment. We can quickly rattle off a few Old Testament stories and images of fire: the burning bush from which God spoke to Moses; the pillar of fire that provided direction to the people of Israel at night during the Exodus from Egypt; the fire that Elijah called down at Mount Carmel – all signs and demonstrations of the presence of God and the power of God. Those are just a few. But it may have been the imagery from the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah in Malachi that Jesus had in mind here.

READ Malachi 2:17 – 3:4

That passage from Malachi falls right into a long line of descriptions from the prophets about a time they often referred to as the “coming Day of the Lord”. For people under foreign oppression, the idea of the “Day of the Lord” had some initial appeal – that was going to be when the Assyrians or Babylonians or Philistines or Arameans or Edomites or whoever were going to see who was boss. They were going to get what was coming to them. But the more the prophets talked, the more the people began to understand that the “coming Day of the Lord” was about God exercising judgment against everybody, and it might surprise them who would be on the wrong end of that. The refiner's fire was not particular where the metal ore came from – that fire separated the gold or silver from the impurities, and the impurities all looked the same to the refiner as he threw them on the slag heap. The refiner's fire makes a definitive separation between what is to be preserved and valued and what is to be thrown out. That's judgment. We prefer the description of the Messiah as the “Prince of Peace”, but Jesus is reminding us here that the complete package of the presence and power of God includes

God's judgment. God will separate those who love Him from those who do not, and God tells us clearly how we claim His forgiveness and grace to be on the right side of that separation.

Jesus also reminds us here that in the present time – and this is just as true now as it was then – those who choose God, who choose to accept God's grace and live in God's love, will be different from the world around them. The choice to claim our relationship with God as our highest priority, to make God really Lord of our lives, and to purposefully live in God's will is going to separate us from the world around us, even sometimes from those closest to us. Our objective in fulfillment of the Great Commission to make disciples of all the nations includes claiming the power of the Holy Spirit to work in and through us to bring everyone with us, but this passage reminds us that some will not respond.

The pastor at the Ojo United Methodist Church on the Navajo reservation in New Mexico, Fred Yazzie, was the first Navajo ordained in the United Methodist Church. United Methodist missionaries to the Navajo sent Fred to college and seminary, and when he returned to the reservation to begin his ministry, his family disowned him. That is a common story in cultures that are openly dominated by non-Christian traditions. It is just as common in other ways in our tradition, where we are nominally a Christian culture, but it is increasingly hard to tell. Right here, in rural north Florida, we are challenged to be different. And if we are truly faithful to our calling as children of God, we will be different, and the difference will be obvious. We may not be disowned by our family, but we can experience rejection and separation and frustration all the same. Jesus is telling us to not let that surprise us or discourage us, but to recognize it as a sign that our life in grace is making us different. In a good way.

Jesus uses the weather forecast to challenge those people to pay attention to what was happening right before them. In Israel, when they looked to the west and saw clouds rolling in from the Mediterranean, they knew it was going to rain. When they looked to the south and felt the desert wind in their face, they knew it was going to be hot. His challenge to them was to recognize the Messiah standing before them, to hear what He had been saying since His first sermon back in Nazareth about the fulfillment of God's

promise to send the Messiah. It is really easy for us to be critical of those people for not getting it. We look at what they experienced first-hand, and think “How could they miss that?” But it is pretty arrogant of us to think we would have done any better. Human nature has not changed, and we still are prone to see what we look for. It is a good thing Gail is not here, or she would be thinking about all the stuff I don’t find in the pantry because I’m not putting in the time or effort to look under or behind something. I’m learning, but slowly.

This passage has nothing to do with interpreting current events in the context of some sort of end-time prophecy. Jesus was not talking to them about the end-time or the final judgment. Jesus was talking to them, and to us, about recognizing God with us. Now. Here. God is present with us in this very time and place, revealing Himself and His love and mercy and forgiveness and grace all the time. God does that through Creation, through His Word, through the actions of His people, through direct revelation to our hearts and minds, through whatever means your imagination can reach, and then some, because God’s imagination is a whole lot greater than ours. If we are not seeing that, if we are not feeling that, if we are not imagining that, it is because we are not open to it. The people Jesus were talking to were missing what was right in front of them because they were not open to a revelation from God that was different from their expectations. The warning to us is to not fall into that trap – to be open all the time to the fact that God is present, and real, and personal, and is acting in every moment to reveal Himself to us in a way that will matter to us.

Finally, Jesus challenges us to give ourselves over to God’s mercy and grace. Not to go on our own into God’s judgment, trusting in our own righteousness, but trusting only in God’s mercy and grace.

There is a sign over the western door of the old Jefferson County Courthouse – the one that sits in the middle of the traffic circle in Monticello – that has two Latin words: *Suum Cuique* (**soo-oom kooi-kwe**). You may have driven by there dozens of times and never seen it. But it caught my eye this week, and I stopped and looked it up right then. One of the people who commented on the definition said it meant “Sue ‘em quick.” What it really is, though, is a Latin term that is translated “to each what he deserves.”

Now if you are were going into the Jefferson County Courthouse to appear before a judge, there is a very limited set of circumstances in which you are willing to say “I hope I get what I deserve”, and really mean it. The only circumstance, really, in which you can say that in complete honesty is if you are totally blameless.

When you come before God at your final judgment, are you willing to say “*sum cuique (soo-oom kooi-kwe)*” – “I hope I get what I deserve”? There are two important facts to remember before you answer: the first is that we will all face that judgment, and the second is that none of us will come to that judgment blameless. Paul underscored that with what he said to the Romans at 3:23: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Only one Man was ever blameless, and He was God Incarnate. None of us can hope to survive the refiner’s fire of God’s judgment on our own merits because we all fall short of the standard of perfection that was exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ. We all have the same flaw, but we also all have the same hope through that same Jesus Christ. Paul continues: “... all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came in Christ Jesus.”

This passage all comes together right here, as the reality of God’s judgment and the reality of God’s grace are joined in Jesus Christ. He was – and is – at once, the standard of perfection that we are measured against, and the redeemer who measures us by His grace. He was – and is – at once, seated on the throne of judgment knowing what we deserve, and the provider of our deliverance from what we deserve. For the person who turns in faith to God, the “coming Day of the Lord” is manifest in our present – not some vague future, but in the reality of our every day, living in the grace of God. We are not just ready for the fire, ready for the challenge, ready for the judgment – we are living in the fire, taking up the challenge, standing before the throne, giving Almighty God all the praise and glory and honor and worship for the gift of His love and grace that saves us and makes us His own.

That’s real. And it is for you.

Amen.