

File: Pent 13C RCL Text: Luke 12:49-53 “Jesus and Minnesota Nice”

Dear Friends in Christ, Grace to you and peace from god our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen!

Minnesota has a reputation as being a “nice” place. A nice place for a lot of things; a nice place to live, a place with good public schools, a place with nice people. And of course there’s that term “Minnesota Nice” which is used to describe the people here. I’ve never seen a specific definition but at the very least it conjures up an image of people being friendly, welcoming and kind. While there are differing opinions on what Minnesota “nice” really is and even some disagreement over whether or not it’s such a great thing, there are worse things to be known for than being “nice”.

Would Jesus qualify as MN nice? What do you think? By that I mean is he a pretty nice guy with some nice things to say. If he were your neighbor would he show up at your door when you moved in with a fresh batch of chocolate chip cookies and welcome you to the neighborhood? Is following Jesus a nice thing to do?

He does a lot of nice things right? He’s even called “The Prince of Peace, “The Bread of Life”, “The Living Water”. He certainly had moments of kindness and compassion. Leading up to today’s passage he’s already cast out a demon, healed Simon’s mother-in-law, cleansed a leper, healed a paralytic, he’s told us not to judge, to love our enemies, calmed a storm, raised a woman’s son from the dead and more. That’s some pretty nice stuff. On top of this the Gospel of Luke being with the passage we always read at Christmas which makes us feel all warm and fuzzy—what a nice Guy this Jesus is. The MN NICE Jesus is one we would imagine would never offend anybody—always want people to get along and talk about love.

The MN NICE Jesus is our friend, our guide, our confidant, our buddy. Who doesn't want the kind of peace he talks about? We want him to grant us eternal life. It all sounds so "nice".

So what happens when we run into a passage like we have this morning that is anything but MN NICE? He says "from now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." Some might be thinking, I don't need Jesus to have that happen, sounds like our last family reunion or family vacation.

The passage flies in the face of the "nice" things about Jesus. The MN NICE Jesus should be saying he brings comfort to families-peace on earth-that he bridges the chasms of silence between fathers & sons, that he's come to heal the wounds of regret that drives mothers and daughters apart. That IS what we want him to say, why? Because we want an idealized notion of Jesus—the MN NICE version. Frankly it's a little like getting married. You go out on a few dates and if you think you're falling in love you can hardly stand being apart. It's easy to pretty quickly get an idealized notion of what it might be like to be married. Some couples are more in love with the idea of getting married than they are in love with their partner. Then you get married and you quickly realize there's going to be some work involved, some choices to be made and some consequences that go along with them.

Or like having kids, you realize pretty quickly how much it changes your life and pretty soon you're making choices you weren't before. Or like taking a new job. You read the job

description and it all looks good and you're fired up and there's that little clause at the end that says "Other as Needed".. pretty soon you realize there's more to the job than you thought.

Letting the Lord have a claim on your life isn't only about the "nice" stuff. It's about letting him lead you to the cutting edge of life where it's not about being "religious" anymore but it's about chasing after God's will. And there are times it can bring division because frankly a lot of people, even church folk aren't really interested in God's will unless it's convenient.

When you allow God to claim you, it can bring division within yourself. Divisions like right and wrong do make a difference. Maybe you find yourself struggling over unethical decision in the workplace, maybe cutting corners on a client to pad the bottom line, perhaps shading the truth to someone you love. Here's the deal: letting the Lord have a claim on our life IS NOT, let me repeat IS NOT, about doing the right thing to earn browning points with God.

What it is about and I really don't know any other way to say it other than it's like walking in harmony with God, being in sync. It's the internal division where we sometimes think, Oh just this once it doesn't really matter, or it's really no big deal nobody will see. Letting Jesus have a claim on our lives is really about knowing that what we do, not only in the big picture of our life but in the small picture we experience every day matters.

It is a challenge. Even the Apostle Paul said after his conversion on the road to Damascus "The good I want to do is the good I can't do and the bad stuff I don't want to do is the very stuff I find myself doing?"

Letting god have a claim on our life can also bring external division. Some of you grew up in a place and are old enough to remember a time when if you were a Lutheran there was an unwritten but sometimes spoken rule that you didn't date the Catholic from across town and

vice-versa. Or if you were Swedish you didn't date the Norwegian or German. Some here know the dynamics of those kinds of things like the dynamics of a Lutheran/Catholic, Lutheran/Baptist kind of things.

In some families the division occurs when it comes to getting kids to Sunday school and Confirmation. One parent is for it and one is against. Or both parents are for it and the child is against it. Households don't always agree on where to worship, one feels at home in one church and the other feels at home worshipping elsewhere. Sometimes a spouse is OK with their partner going to church but if they start taking their praying or Bible reading too seriously they feel like the other has then the whole religion thing a little too far..

Faith in Christ can divide people when it comes to generosity, where one is comfortable giving just what's convenient and left over but when the other wants to take a leap of faith the other puts their foot down and says it's out of the question. Faith in Christ can divide when it comes to forgiveness when one person feels the need to forgive and move on and the other still desperately want to hang on to the offense so they can have some "power" in the relationship.

This whole passage about Jesus bringing division isn't about does the toilet paper go over or under or about squeezing the toothpaste from the bottom or the middle or with which relatives to spend Christmas this year. Honestly, it's about will we take all of Jesus seriously even the Jesus that challenges us. A half-hearted commitment never brings division because it's easy to just blow Jesus off "Why Jesus didn't really mean that or he didn't really mean for me to do that."

The Lord doesn't offer any 50% off sales or bargains. There's no deal for those who want to find an easier or cheaper way, there's no "close out bargains". Jesus is talking about the

cost of following as surrendering. Nobody like the word surrender because it sounds like failure. But we're reminded in Matthew 10:39 "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

The truth is, when we surrender, instead of life being turned upside down Jesus turns our life UPSIDE RIGHT. You can chase after everything the world has to offer but in the end where does it get you? That's why Scripture says "what does it profit a person if they gain the world but forfeit their soul?" That's why this text is so hard. Because it reminds us that to allow The Lord to lay claim to our lives is not always a walk in the park. It's not just being polite, and nice and minding our own business. To follow where Jesus leads, to chase after God's will leads to being picked up and turned UPSIDE RIGHT. If we take Jesus seriously it is basically countercultural and there might be some bumps along the way.

Those bumps might be things like it's not easy to show wisdom by trusting people, to handle leadership by serving, to handle those who offend us by forgiving, to handle money by sharing generously or to handle enemies by loving. To allow Jesus to have a claim on our lives might mean there aren't a whole bunch of tangible rewards. There's no promise life will be smooth. But we allow him to claim us because of who he is---and who he is is not just the nice Jesus but the real Jesus.

Ultimately the creator knows the needs of our souls better than we do. He knows ultimately what brings the kind of peace the world cannot give, even at its best. The Lord knows the only real peace that can be found is yielding to him and allowing him to have a claim on our lives.

Some this morning may have only been living with the Minnesota Nice Jesus. If so, this morning I'd like to invite you to let down your defenses, get rid of your religious filters and make space in your soul and possible for the first time to being walking with Jesus empowered by The Holy Spirit and begin to chase after God's will for you and start the journey of a lifetime. A journey led by the creator of life, the forgiver of your sins, the Prince of Peace, the Savior of the world. Let us pray.