

“Jesus Said What?” based on Luke 12:49-56  
Aspen Community United Methodist Church  
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(We are surprised at Jesus’ anger and expression of great stress,  
but even the “spiritual giants” have their moments.)

Even the spiritual giants get angry.  
This is not the gentle Jesus we like to think we know.  
This is not the approachable Jesus we have traditionally come to expect.

We preachers sometimes examine these words of Jesus  
and point out how accurate they are – how they do reflect something in our lives.

For example – Jesus says he comes to bring fire.  
We know that fire is symbolic of transformation.

He says that we might naively think he brings peace -  
but aside from the kind of peace that personal religious practice brings -  
we know that religion is one of the most divisive things on earth.

While he wants to give us peace  
he also wants to make us uneasy with our carelessness.

Jesus talks about conflict in families.

We know that the conflicts we encounter in our lives  
usually stem from relationships in our families of origin.

Those conflicts – perhaps we call them competitions -  
are real and they provide challenges to be worked out as we grow and mature.  
The better we work through them – the more successful we are - in relationships as adults.

The meaning of the words in our lesson this morning is not all that surprising -  
but the tone is strident.

It throws us off and causes us to say “Jesus said what?”

He seems angry. He is stressed at the least.

Of course he is.

He is on his way to Jerusalem  
and his message is much too threatening to the status quo  
and he will be killed.

But - he must live by what he believes to be his purpose.  
He will not be hypocritical like most of us will when we see injustice.

Most of us will be careful  
that we don’t compromise ourselves to much –  
in the pursuit of justice.

Jesus is also speaking within the context of his world view –  
the social – cultural – and religious environment in which he lives.

We listen from our world view.

Jesus and the people around him believed that the world will end in their lifetimes.  
They believed that society has become so corrupted –  
that Yahweh will step in and change things.

People need to count themselves in or out.  
So – some of their issues will sound strange to us- but maybe not all that strange.



Remember Moses at Mt. Sinai?  
In Judaism – we are now in the month of Elul.  
Elul is a month with special attention given to divine grace and mercy.  
It goes back to Moses.  
It goes back to the first year after the Jewish people went out of Egypt.  
Not long after the Exodus they received the Torah at Mt. Sinai.  
Moses is up on the mountain for 40 days - having the stone tablets inscribed.

Remember what the people did?  
They took all their gold jewelry and goblets and melted them down  
and made a golden calf to worship.  
Upon descending from the mountain and seeing what had happened –  
witnessing their transgression so to speak - what does Moses do?  
He smashes the tablets.  
These are the tablets on which God has inscribed the Ten Commandments.

So he has to return to Mt Sinai for a second 40 days  
to convince God to redo the tablets.

The story has it that on the early morning of the 1<sup>st</sup> of Elul  
Moses again ascended Mt Sinai - taking with him the stone tables  
for God to re-inscribe the Ten Commandments.  
Moses remains on the mountain another 40 days.

This month came to be called the month of Elul -  
because of God’s whole-hearted forgiveness and reconciliation.  
Observing the month is a way to consider how we can live in the same way.  
And it leads up to those deep and meaningful high holy days  
of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

I wonder if Jesus ever felt like Moses?  
He would have known the story well.

Had Moses angry outburst not happened  
which resulted in smashing the tablets – and had he not had to go back

and ask God to re-inscribe the commandments -  
the process might have gone much smoother.

But then – something had to be done about that golden calf.  
No doubt his frustration was justified.

And who knows what clean up work  
Jesus and the disciples may have had to do after this speaking engagement.  
And – no doubt his frustration and stress was justified.

Like I said – it is not the Jesus who healed the cripple  
and brought sight to the blind and not the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount.  
This is all to say that even the spiritual giants have their days.

To me that is comforting –  
because I consider Jesus to have been a person – a human being – a teacher  
from whom I never cease to learn.



Last week I had us think about balance  
as we work on spiritual growth -  
in the way we encounter emotions and events in our lives.  
I suggested we consider where we are on a few continuums:  
profound gratitude on the one side and a sense of entitlement on the other.

patience on the one side and impatience on the other.

trust on the one side and worry on the other.

humility on the one side and arrogance on the other.

consideration on the one side and carelessness on the other.

generosity on the one side and stinginess on the other.

energy and timeliness – we could say enthusiasm on the one side  
and procrastination on the other.

In Moses’ crowd they appear to have leaned toward  
arrogance, impatience, and worry.

In Jesus’ crowd they may have leaned toward  
carelessness and procrastination.  
Perhaps they are good illustrations for us.

So – what has this to do with Jesus  
suggesting that he would indeed bring conflict  
into a world that he thought would not be around much longer?  
And what has this to do with Moses  
destroying the first tablets inscribed with God’s covenant  
with his people - when he saw that golden calf?

It is about how we live in community.  
I wonder if our actions are stressful to the divine every day -  
if the divine is something that can be stressed.

I found a greeting card one time that I have kept  
for just the right time to send.  
It has one child saying to another - “I bet we give God a lot of headaches.”

I don’t know if God is something we can give a headache to.  
But – I know we give each other a lot of headaches -  
people all over the world - so many different approaches to life  
different conditions to live in and different access to resources for living.

Whether you think of Jesus as God  
or you think of Jesus as teacher and healer and tireless leader -  
and follow him because he discovered a pathway that calls to you -  
the stories still tell us a lot about ourselves.

This story of Jesus calls us to be responsible  
in ways we might not have realized.

He calls us to learn from our families -  
because that is the first place we learn about conflict.

He calls us to pay attention to things around us - with his image of the weather.  
Perhaps this story even alerts us to how stressed we can often be.

But most of all he calls us – like Moses –  
to care deeply and faithfully for our world.