

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 10
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Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
The cost is sooo worth it!

—Luke 12:49-53

Every good parent understands the concept of “tough love.” Loving your children means that you don’t always give them exactly what they want, because you love them enough to keep things away from them that are harmful. “No, Susie, you can’t reach out and touch the pot of boiling water on the stove. No, Johnny, you can’t go play with the snake that found its way into the corner of the backyard, and you can’t have it as a pet.” Those are trite examples, but you get the picture. You don’t always tell your children exactly what they want to hear. “No, you can’t stay out with that group of friends, because they’re a bad influence on you, they’re not good for you.” Sometimes tough love provokes confusion and anger and resentment, but you love your children enough to give them what’s best for them, even if it’s not always what *they* think is best for them. You *discipline* your children to train them, not in harshness but in love. The word *discipline* is connected to the word “disciple,” someone who is being trained. And it’s not only your children. Sometimes you tell other people—your friends, family members, neighbors, peers—things they don’t want to hear, not to be a jerk but because you care enough to keep them from doing things that are bad for them.

Many people want the teachings of Jesus to always be words of feel-good, emotionally uplifting encouragement. They want Jesus to be all about positivity and affirmation. They want gentle Jesus, meek and mild, a soft touch, the guy who brings positive energy, who looks the other way when I want to have some sinful fun. When I say “they” I really mean “we” because sometimes you and I find ourselves in that crowd. My sinful nature wants a Savior who isn’t too serious, a Christian faith that’s just shallow and superficial. Our sinful nature wants a Christianity where we hold hands and sing Kumbaya, don’t rock the boat, don’t upset the apple cart, just sort of coast.

Then Jesus comes along with his words we hear today, and it blows that kind of shallow Christianity out of the water. He speaks of fire on the earth. Of conflict within families. Of division. Today we’re starting a new worship series called “Wounds that Heal.” For the next several weeks we’re going to be looking at words from Scripture that are difficult to hear and hard to swallow—words that wound us and convict us. But we’re also going to appreciate that by wounding our sinful nature, God also heals us. He pulls us into his arms and comforts us, so that we come away with a stronger, deeper relationship with our loving God and Savior.

So why is Jesus so divisive? Why is Jesus the dividing line that separates one group of people from another? I mean, Jesus is the Savior of all people. Jesus loves everyone. He loves the rich and the poor, people of every race, language and tribe. He loves people who to us seem unlovable: heinous criminals, people who have done terrible things. And not only does Jesus love every human being, he died for every human being. He gave his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world. There is not a single human being who lives or has ever lived on this planet for whom Jesus did not die. Everyone is a precious, blood-bought soul, for whom the blood of the Son of God was spilled on the cross. Everyone has been redeemed by Jesus’ death and sacrifice. Every sin has been paid for. Every debt was canceled at Calvary. The *universality* of Jesus’ sacrifice and God’s forgiveness in Christ is something that we find very comforting because if Jesus loves and died for everyone, that also means that he loves and died for me. There is nothing that can separate you and me from God’s love. That’s important to remember during those times in our lives when we feel unloved, or unforgiven. God loves *you* in Christ, and Jesus died for *you*, and *your* sins are forgiven in Jesus.

So where does the division come in? It arises from the fact that Jesus is the *only* way any human being can find forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and eternal life. Jesus is the only Son of God who was made flesh and lived and died for the sin of the world. Jesus is the only Savior who made the atoning sacrifice to pay for the debt of human sin. There is no one else who can take sin away. There is no one else who can bring us into a right relationship with the Father. Only Jesus! So the eternal destiny of any human being hinges on his or her relationship to Jesus. Repent of your sin and trust Jesus for forgiveness, and enjoy all the gifts of salvation God has prepared for you. Continue in your sin and trust something else for forgiveness, and you will remain under God’s wrath. There’s the division: Jesus is the dividing line. You are either with Jesus, or you are against Jesus. You’re either going to love Jesus, or you’re going to blow him off. There is no middle ground. There is no sitting on the fence. Every human being falls into one of only two camps: penitent believer or unbeliever.

That means that when the message of forgiveness of sins and eternal life is preached in Jesus’ name, it is either going to be met with joy and thanksgiving, or with indifference, resentment or outright hostility. But there will be division! Jesus has said so. The good news of salvation will divide friends and families. It will prompt persecution. It may bring great pain. Jesus isn’t telling us these things about Christianity to scare us. He’s just telling it like it is. This is tough love. This is the real cost that you and I will bear as disciples.

Now knowing the cost, we can assess the benefits. We can ask honestly, “Is it worth it?” And the good news is: The cost is sooo worth it! God has something much bigger and much better planned for you, something that goes way beyond the shallow and superficial. I like the Scripture in 1 Corinthians where the apostle says, “Eye has not seen, ear has not heard,

mind has not conceived of the things God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). We understand the costs of being a Christian. Let's look at the benefits.

With Jesus you have hope. Not an empty wish or idle speculation but rock-solid, certain hope in Christ. God's promises are certain that when your time on earth is done he will take you to his side in heaven. And not only you, but as you go through life and say farewell to loved ones who have died in Christ, you know that you will see them again when we are reunited in heaven. Precious family members, dear friends, beloved spouses—when we say farewell it's not forever. We will be with the Lord forever.

With Jesus you have peace. Whatever troubles and turmoil you go through in this life, nothing can rob you of the peace that passes all understanding. Whatever storms life throws at you—and there will be many!—you can rest securely in your Father's arms, knowing that he who has loved you with an everlasting love and called you his very own has everything in control. You have the peace of resting in him.

With Jesus you have strength and confidence. You know who you are: you are a baptized, redeemed, forgiven, blood-bought child of your heavenly Father, and nobody can take that away from you. That is your identity. That gives you conviction and confidence.

With Jesus you have freedom. Here's the irony: being a slave to Jesus Christ is the ultimate freedom! You have freedom from guilt. Your sins are forgiven; God has decreed it. Your debt has been paid by the blood of Jesus. Your guilt is gone. The shadow of your past doesn't control you any longer; you are free. You have freedom from Satan, your enemy who tempts you and accuses you. You are free from his control and power. He cannot harm you. You can refuse his temptations to sin, and when he brings up your sins of the past and accuses you, the gracious voice of Jesus drowns out the nagging voice of Satan. Jesus pronounces you forgiven and free.

With Jesus you have immortality. Stop and reflect on that for a second. This is what everyone wants: to live forever, the fountain of youth, eternal life. You have it! You have been rescued from this life of tears and this body of death, and you will be raised from death to live with Jesus in heaven forever. Jesus says very plainly, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish" (John 10:28). Immortality, my friends! Eternal life! It's not a fantasy or a fairy tale. It's a real promise from Jesus, who has the power to deliver.

I could go on for a long time talking about all the benefits and blessings that make the cost of being a Christian so worth it, but I'll just mention this: When we are with Jesus, God is glorified. It's not just about what we get out of it. It's about honoring God. If we suffer for Jesus, God is glorified. If we stick up for Jesus, God is glorified. If we don't cave in the face of worldly pressure, God is glorified. If we are witnesses for Jesus, God is glorified. That's why Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth: To save the world and to honor his Father.

To wrap up our study of God's Word today, I want to leave you with a little illustration. Jesus says his Word will cause divisions, so picture this: Up on the Mogollon Rim there are two campsites separated by a little road. Two groups of campers show up, and each family takes one of the sites. One of the groups of campers is well-provisioned. Their tents are sturdy, they have tarps to keep their firewood dry, they have plenty of warm clothing, blankets, and lots of food. The other family across the road—well, let's just say they left a lot of those things at home. The day starts out beautiful, and in the morning hours everyone is happy. But it's monsoon season, and in the late afternoon a huge storm cloud sends howling winds, buckets of rain, and pelting hail. Then, when the rain stops and the wind dies down, the temperature plummets. As evening falls, the one family is dressed in warm clothes, snuggling up to a roaring fire. Right across the little dirt road, the other family is sitting under collapsed, waterlogged tents, shivering in wet clothes, hungry, and freezing. The first family calls to the folks in the other campsite, "Hey, come on over and join us! Come have some food, come enjoy the fire, come get warm and cozy. It's nice over here!" The other family says, "Nah, we're good." And they keep on freezing. Is there a division between those two camps? Yes, there's a little road that runs between them. But the real division is in the attitude that keeps them apart.

As Christians we invite people to know Jesus. We have forgiveness, eternal life, comfort, peace—we're blessed with all those things. And we say to other people, "Come on over, bask in the glow of Christ, share in the joy of salvation, the promise of eternal life, and everything that goes with it. Come on over, it's nice over here!" We want to break down walls, we want to open doors, we want to do everything possible on our end, so there are no barriers to others enjoying a blessed life with Jesus. But unbelief and pride and habits and stubbornness get in the way, so there is a division between those who enjoy a new life with Christ and those who hold Jesus at arm's length. Sometimes people resent our invitation. "Leave me alone! I want to do my thing!" But we keep inviting.

Is the cost worth it? It was worth it to God, who gave his dearest treasure, his only-begotten Son, to save us from our sins—Jesus Christ, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2). The cost was worth it to save you and to save the world. God has redeemed the world and opened heaven for all who trust Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life. For us, the little hiccups and speedbumps, the light and momentary troubles we experience in this life are completely overshadowed by the promise of what is waiting for us in heaven. In any case, the cost is sooo worth it! Amen.