

Sermon

How to Interpret the Present Time

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In today's Gospel from Luke, we encounter Jesus in a markedly different state of mind than we might be accustomed to. He's no longer simply teaching or healing—he's preparing his disciples for what lies ahead. Up to this point, they've followed him faithfully from crowd to crowd, watching his every move, listening intently to his words, and trying to make sense of the new world he's unveiling. They've witnessed the power of prayer, the intimacy of communion with God, the call to serve others, and the radical inclusion of those on the margins. And in those teachings, it's easy to settle into a sense of comfort—a faith that feels familiar, perhaps even safe.

But today is different.

Today, Jesus is urging his disciples to interpret the present time. He's drawing them into a deeper awareness of the path they're on—a path that will soon lead through suffering, betrayal, and ultimately, the Passion and crucifixion. They don't yet grasp the full weight of what's coming, but Jesus does. And so, his words carry urgency, even intensity—he speaks of fire and division, not to frighten them, but to shake them from complacency. Because he knows: if they are to remain faithful not only through the trials ahead but in the mission that follows, they must be fully awake to the moment they're living in.

❓ Jesus declares, “I came to bring fire to the earth...”—a startling image that challenges our assumptions about peace and comfort. The passage confronts us with division, urgency, and the need for spiritual discernment.❓

Parts of this sermon on the Gospel referenced drew inspiration from Midway Christian Church and J. Marshall Jenkins.

Jesus rebukes the crowd for understanding the weather but failing to interpret the spiritual climate.

Fire symbolizes purification, judgment, and the coming of God's Kingdom. What does that actually mean? God's Kingdom? Is this something we have to wait for or is it something we can create right now? If God is creator of all things, isn't this God's Kingdom? Yes, so it is always there for the taking – we are always able to lean into and live in that Kingdom...when we choose it. When we make the conscious choice to believe it, preach it, proclaim it. But this warning from Jesus is real even in our present time.

Division, urgency and spiritual discernment – Division is a normal part of our world, isn't it? We have political division, philosophical separation, even how we love each other can bring division. And Jesus is not just talking about the world in general – Jesus warns this division has and will come upon families. Have you ever experienced that? Of course you have. This isn't a call to conflict but a recognition that truth often provokes resistance. The Gospel demands allegiance that may challenge cultural, familial, or societal norms in our families, with our closest friends at times, and in churches. Jesus criticizes the crowd's ability to read the sky but not the spiritual moment. What are the signs of our time? Climate crises, social upheaval, gluttony and greed? Are we discerning God's movement in these events—or just seeking comfort or words and scripture that justify where we stand on something – so we can be right?

We are in an age of transformation. What we believed to be true, practices we were comfortable with no longer track. Yet, there is indeed

comfort and state of being that we need in some of our traditional practices, isn't there?

So my question for you is this. Where do we need to set things ablaze in our lives, our practices, our beliefs? What have we held onto that no longer serves? The fire that Jesus was talking about is not a destructive fire but one that encourages new growth, perhaps new direction but what nourishes that new growth, is the brush or foundation that remains rich under our feet. What we have known is not without purpose -it must be part of who we are. But now we move in a new direction with a broader understanding of why we turn the corner, how we approach it, and when.

In our first reading from Jeremiah 23:23–29, the prophet delivers a piercing message from God, confronting the false prophets who mislead the people with comforting lies and deceptive dreams. God asks, “Am I a God near by, and not a God far off?”—reminding us of His intimate presence and omniscience. We can't hide from God; He sees and knows all. Like Jesus reminded us in our passage last week, he will break into our lives like a thief breaks in. Even when we wander away, God needs and wants us to see and feel God's presence.

The passage contrasts false dreams with the true Word of God. These false prophets claim divine authority—“I have dreamed!”—but their messages are like straw: empty, weightless, and incapable of nourishing the soul. In contrast, God's Word is like wheat—substantial, sustaining, and life-giving. We are bombarded daily with constant information, tiny little sound bites that sink into our subconscious mind and live there like they are truly meaningful. Sometimes they are benign like an easier way to get out a tough stain or how

to fold a fitted sheet, but many times they have hidden meaning and message that may make us feel or think a certain way. They are indeed empty, weightless and incapable of nourishing our soul – and yet they take up space when we allow it.

Then comes the powerful declaration: **“Is not my word like fire... and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”** God’s Word, hearing our inner divine, purifies like fire and shatters resistance like a hammer. It exposes falsehood, convicts the heart, and brings transformation. It is not soft or soothing when truth must be spoken—it is fierce, cleansing, and unrelenting.

This passage calls us to discernment, true discernment, where we sit quietly and meditate to hear our own inner spirit, our presence with God. Where we suppress outside words, thoughts, or interpretations. In a world full of competing voices, we must ask: Are we listening to the dreams of men or the voice of God? Are we seeking comfort or truth? The Word of God demands our attention, our reverence, and our response.

To interpret the present time is to live with eyes wide open to the movement of God in our midst. It means embracing the discomfort of transformation and summoning the courage to stand with conviction. Yes, we know how to read the weather. Yes, we can analyze what lies before us and make choices accordingly. But God is calling us to something deeper—to discern not just the signs in the sky, but the stirrings of the Spirit. God speaks through both the quiet nudges within and the bold signs around us. That is the heart of discernment. So may we be a people who read the signs—not with fear or indifference, but with faith, hope, and love. For God is doing a new thing. The question is not whether it will happen—but whether we will choose

to be part of it, or continue chasing the fleeting ideals of the world. The time is now. Let us respond with our whole lives.

Amen