

Division = Grace?

August 17, 2025

Our Broken World

According to the U.K. newspaper the Guardian, several small towns across the United States cancelled their Latino cultural festivals this past week. These festivals weren't cancelled because of rain, or lack of volunteers, or even budget shortfalls. They were cancelled because of fear—fear of ICE raids. Even though no specific threats had been made, the climate of fear was enough to shut them down.

Think about that: celebrations of food, music, art, and tradition—a space where communities could come together—were stopped before they began, because fear was more powerful than hope, more powerful than joy, more powerful than neighbors gathering as neighbors.

That's what division looks like in 2025. It's not just arguments at Thanksgiving dinner, or what cable news hosts yell about. It's a wound in the life of a community. It's something as joyful as a cultural festival being silenced by suspicion and hostility.

One of my best friends now has custody arrangements for her young neighbor, in case he comes home from school one day and his parents don't. And into a world like that, we hear Jesus say: "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division."

Jesus' Fire

It's jarring to hear those words from the "Prince of Peace." Isn't Jesus supposed to be the one who calms storms, heals wounds, and makes broken things whole?

But as Rev. Chelsey Harmon points out, Jesus' life was laser-focused on God's redemptive purpose. Everything about him—his teaching, his compassion, his passion, his prayers—was saturated with God's mission.

And that mission was, frankly, disruptive. Because what the world calls "peace" is often just "business as usual."

- Peace is silence, as long as nobody asks hard questions.
- Peace is comfort, as long as the system keeps working for the people on top.
- Peace is calm, as long as the poor stay poor, the sick stay sick, and the outsider stays outside.

Jesus' peace disrupts that false peace. His fire burns away injustice, hypocrisy, and empty religion. And so to those who benefit from the way things are, Jesus' peace feels like war.

Crisis as the Edge of Change

This is what grassroots activist Lisa Fithian means when she says, "I create crisis, because crisis is that edge where change is possible."

Jesus came to create holy crisis. Not for the sake of drama, but because crisis forces us to confront what we'd rather ignore. Crisis is the place where "business as usual" finally breaks open.

- In his time, "business as usual" meant crushing debt, systemic poverty, and whole groups of people pushed to the margins.
- In our time, "business as usual" meant crushing debt, systemic poverty, and whole groups of people pushed to the margins.
- In our time, "business as usual" also means racism, climate breakdown, and communities too afraid to celebrate their own culture.

And Jesus says, "Enough. I have come to bring fire."

Why Peace Feels Like War

Chelsey Harmon reminds us that when someone truly lives differently—when they live God's future now—it will always disrupt the system around them.

- When a person in recovery says "no more," peace feels like war to the family system that resists change.
- When an LGBTQ teen comes out, peace feels like war to the parents who would rather keep up appearances.
- When Christians insist that love of God means welcoming immigrants, caring for creation, protecting the vulnerable, peace feels like war to a culture built on profit and exclusion.

For those who need to change, God's peace will always feel like war. "Jesus didn't come to make us comfortable—he came to make us dangerous to the powers of this world."

Good News in the Fire

So where is the good news in all of this? The good news is that God's fire doesn't just destroy—it refines. It purifies. It makes us new.

Psalm 40 reminds us that the God who pulls us up out of the pit and sets our feet on solid ground is the same God who puts a new song in our mouths. That's what Jesus is after—not scorched earth, but new life. Not endless division, but a deeper peace than the world can understand.

Conclusion

So what if the divisions we feel right now aren't proof that we're failing or that the world is coming to an end, but proof that God is moving? What if the tension in our world — and even sometimes in our families — is the groaning of a new creation being born?

When Jesus said he came to bring fire, he wasn't announcing the end of the story. He was declaring the beginning of God's better story. The friction we feel when we insist on justice, the pushback when we dare to love boldly, the strain when we refuse the easy path of silence — all of that is evidence that we are standing right where Jesus told us to stand.

Division, uncomfortable as it is, can be a signpost: it means we've chosen compassion over convenience, truth over comfort, God's kingdom over business-as-usual. And that's good news. Because in the end, God's fire doesn't consume us — it refines us. It forges communities that are more courageous, more faithful, more alive with hope.

So yes, the world is divided. But take heart: that division means the kingdom is pressing in. The cracks we see are not just fractures— they are places where the light of God is breaking through.

And friends— we are part of that light. We are part of that fire. We are agents of God's new creation. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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Luke 12:49–56, Psalm 40:1–8
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