



**MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**AND**  
**IMMANUEL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org) and [immanuelshirley.com](http://immanuelshirley.com)

August 17, 2025

Pastor David Ruddat

10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [Jeremiah 23:23-29](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 4c CW<sup>21</sup>

Second Lesson: [Hebrews 12:1-13](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [Luke 12:49-53](#)

**WOUNDS THAT HEAL**  
**God's Word Divides**  
**PEACE WITH HEAVEN BRINGS FIRE ON EARTH**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

**CHILDREN'S DEVOTION**



While you're sitting here, look at this picture. I'm going to ask what is going on in this picture. What is going on in this picture? They are learning how to play soccer, that's very good. What else is going on in this picture? I'll give you a clue. That's a captain and that's a captain. What is going on in the picture? They are picking teams. See how they are picking teams? There is one captain over here and one captain over there and they are picking teams. These were all friends, but then once you start picking teams to play soccer, they are one team or the other. One team is going to win and one team is going to lose. They are picking two teams. One is going to win and one is going to lose. They are people, who are normally friends, but now they are playing soccer and you're on the other team and I'm going to win. My team is going to win.

Jesus today, in the Sermon that you are going to listen to, is going to say there is this thing going on and there are two captains. Jesus is one captain. The devil is the other captain. There are two teams. One is going to win and have eternal life, and one side is going to lose. Jesus, in His Word, says that as we are talking with our family members and our friends about everything, eventually you're going to have this conversation. "Which team are you on?" How important it is for us as Christians to have those conversations, to stay close to Jesus and be on His team and listen to His Word. He is the One who teaches us in the true faith, as we read in the Book of Hebrews. So stay on Jesus' team.

Yes, there might be division in the world, but what is important is to be on Jesus' team, and you guys are, through faith in Jesus Christ. So let's pray.

*Lord Jesus, thank you for picking me to be on your team, by making that decision through your baptism as you baptized me or as you brought the Word of God to me. Help me to stay on your team through that Word. In your name we pray. Amen.*

### **SERMON**

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father through our Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ.

*Direct us now, O gracious Lord, to hear aright your Holy Word.  
Assist your minister to preach, and let the Holy Spirit teach.  
Let eternal life be found by all who hear the Gospel sound. Amen.*

In 2009, a man in Oakland, California named Dan Stevenson had had it. There was a vacant lot across from his house and people were dumping their bags of garbage on that vacant lot: mattresses, drug needles. He had gone to the city and complained and hoped that something could be done about this vacant lot, but nothing was done. Finally, he and his wife, Lu, went over to that vacant lot. They cleaned it up and even though they were not very religious, they secured a statue of Buddha and put it in the vacant lot. Then they sat back and watched what happened. No bags of trash. No mattresses. No drug needles. In fact, an apple was placed by the Buddha, then an orange. These were offerings given to the fake god, in a vacant lot. Eventually, somebody actually went and built a shelter for this Buddha over it. It looks really nice. You can Google "[Oakland Buddha](#)" and you'll see this beautiful shelter that they built over this idol. And it all started because Dan Stevenson had had it.

Of course you could imagine this would get some attention. The newspaper interviewed Dan Stevenson and they said "Even though you're not religious, why did you put a statue of Buddha in the vacant lot?" Dan Stevenson said "If I'd have thought Christ would've pulled it off—Except Christ is so controversial with people. Buddha is a neutral dude. When Ace Hardware is carrying Buddha, it's pretty neutral."

Christians are often blamed for all the divisions within Christianity. While every case of division within Christianity in the visible Church has a story, some of those stories of divisions are legitimate. The truth of the matter is that Jesus says there is a greater truth. Jesus says "There is going to be division and it's going to be caused by me." Why would the Prince of Peace cause divisions? The very simple answer is because if you do not believe in Jesus as your only and complete Savior from sin, the only source of your salvation, there is going to be division from those who think it's Jesus plus something else or something else entirely.

When Jesus speaks in [John 3:16](#) He says, ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*** you would think that would be the most unifying passage, but Jesus wasn’t finished speaking in Verse 16. He also said this in [Verses 17 and 18](#): ***“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*** Sounds good so far! And then, here we go: ***“The one who believes in him is not condemned, but the one who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.”*** Jesus is the one who brings division. Either you believe in Jesus as your only and complete Savior or you don’t. Either you are on His team, completely, or you aren’t. That’s why Jesus says, ***“Do you think that I came to bring peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.”***

But if you think about it, there was division before Jesus came on this earth, before Jesus said those words in [John 3:16](#). There was a division, not between family members so much as it was a division between all of humanity and God. That was brought about by the sin of Adam and Eve. When they sinned, they rebelled against God and they made an enemy of God and they were on Satan’s team. Satan had picked them. They were on his team. They ran away from God. They didn’t go to Him. But God, in that Garden, made a promise. “I will put enmity. I will make an enemy again of you and Satan. I’m going to bring you back on my team because I’m going to send a Savior who is going to crush his head. He’ll strike His heel, but He is going to crush his head.” ([Genesis 3:14-16](#).)

That’s why Jesus is here. That’s why He is distressed in our text. That’s why He says, ***“But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is finished!”*** The picture behind this is that Jesus is feeling closed in, like there is only one direction for Him to go, and that direction for Him to go is to the cross, to suffer and die for the sins of the world, to bring back peace with God and the human race. That’s why He is here and that’s why He talks about Himself as undergoing a baptism of fire. “Baptism” is a Greek word which means “washing.” So you have this picture in the Old Testament of how you got into the temple was through washing. In the New Testament Church, how do we commonly bring people into the church? What is their entrance? It’s through washing. You are going to be washed in the waters of baptism, which links us to Jesus’ death and resurrection.

But Jesus talks about another type of washing that is going to be done to Him, a washing of fire. When we think of fire in the Bible, generally it’s a picture of judgment. It’s a connection of God bringing on the judgment that He has for the world and putting it on Jesus. This can only be done to Jesus. This baptism of fire can only be done through Jesus. He has to undergo the sufferings and the punishment for your sin and mine. We can’t do anything to pay for our sin. We are stuck. We are enslaved. That’s what the Bible says. Without Christ, we are stuck.

I've been going through the Book of Concord in my podcast that I do with Pastor Harley from St. John in Maribel. We are going through the Book of Concord. Right now we are talking about Confession and Absolution and Satisfaction. The Roman Catholic Church was saying, "When you confess your sins, that's great and we forgive your sins. But there is this other thing you have to do, this satisfaction that you have to do that demonstrates whether you are truly repentant or not." The Lutheran Reformers said, "Hold on a second. You confess your sins. You are forgiven. Why? It's because of Jesus." You don't demonstrate to God that you are truly repentant. You don't have to do it. God isn't going to say "You have to do this first before I save you." Either salvation is completely the work of Jesus Christ, or it isn't. Or you aren't saved. As Jesus says in John 3, "Whoever believes in Him..."

We don't think of our spiritual life in terms of "I have to give this indulgence or this satisfaction for the sin that I've done." But so often, aren't we inclined to say "God isn't going to help me" or "God isn't going to forgive me of my sins until I do A, B or C, or X, Y or Z." We forget salvation is only from Jesus. He is the one who undergoes a baptism of fire and He does it for you, so that you would have peace with God. He is the Prince of Peace because He brought peace between you and God through His perfect life and His innocent death on the cross. And it brought fire on earth, not on you, but on Him.

So, brothers and sisters, have confidence. Your Savior took on the fires of God's condemnation. God no longer is angry with you, but He forgives you for Jesus' sake. We have peace with God. We have peace with heaven. But that doesn't mean that our life is going to be easy. Peace with God brings about a fire of division on earth. As Jesus says, ***"I came to throw fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already ignited. Do you think that I came to bring peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. Yes, from now on there will be five divided in one household: 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 her daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."*** Jesus Himself is looking at the smallest Jewish family unit. In our day if we would say we have a family of five, that's pretty big in America. If you have more than two children, maybe that's the average in America. Two children and that's it. In the Jewish mind, that would be the smallest family unit because then you would have a son that is married and a daughter that you could marry off to someone else. That's the smallest family unit. Jesus says that even that small family unit would be divided.

I'm going to make a guess that all of us have people in our family trees that do not go to church. The spiritual but not religious types, the ones which we know we need to have a conversation with. Sometimes what keeps us from having those conversations is a fear that we will cause division, that we will upset the apple cart so to speak. What I like about what Jesus has to say is that the apple cart is already spilled over. There already is division. Jesus has said, "Take, eat; take, drink; whenever you eat and whenever you drink, take these things." "Do not give up meeting together," the writer

to the Hebrews said. As Jesus speaks to the writer of the Hebrews, He tells us to get together, to encourage one another, and we have members in our family tree that are not doing that. Therefore, there is division.

Sometimes peace in one area leads to lack of peace in another. Let's say you are living in the city and you have a tree in your back yard and you want to plant a garden in that back yard but you know that tree also provides shade for your neighbor. Your neighbor likes that tree, but your spouse wants a garden. Peace in one area is going to lead to lack of peace in others. If you cut that tree down and plant a garden, you are going to have lack of peace with your neighbor. But if you leave that tree up and have peace with your neighbor, you are going to have division in your own household. That's what Jesus is talking to us about. Those are the hard words. That is the scalpel that Jesus is using to cut our hearts, to remind us that there is already division.

Who do you want to have peace with, your relative or God? We want to avoid conflict oftentimes, and oftentimes we are more than happy to have conflict with our God rather than division with our family members.

There will be division. There is division. The cool part is that Jesus takes all responsibility. He is not saying "Well, it's your fault that your friend or your neighbor is no longer in church." Jesus says, "This is mine. I have created this because my Word is like fire. My Word is like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces. My Word says things very plainly. Only through me...", only through the Word, only through faith in Jesus as our one and only Savior and our complete Savior from sin are we at peace with God. And each one of us has a sinful nature that thinks that it can get its own way to God. Our friends and our family members who aren't in church also have that same sinful nature that you do that thinks that they are going to get to God a different way than through Jesus and His Word.

The comfort that I have in here is not just that Jesus takes responsibility for that division but also that Jesus doesn't tell us how long the division lasts. He just says it's there. He doesn't say it's going to be there forever, that there is no hope, that there is no opportunity, that there is no possibility that wound could be healed. He just says it's there. The One who inflicts with that scalpel and divides the heart, the One who divides humanity into those two teams is the only one that can bring them together, through His Word. It starts with Him, and He uses you and me to speak His words of life. And the One who encourages us to speak those words is not one who is going to leave us alone. We are not divided from Him. We have peace with Him. He is on our side and stands behind us.

We don't like that the world is polarized and divisive and in one respect it will never, ever be healed. In 200 A.D., there was some graffiti found in Rome of a man who has his Latin inscription on the bottom of it. It says "Alexamenos worships [his] god." On that picture, that graffiti, there is a picture almost like a stick figure of a Roman soldier giving

his allegiance to his god, who is being crucified on a tree, except the god that is in the picture, the man that is being crucified on the tree, has a donkey head on the top. So you can put two and two together about what is going on there, what this graffiti artist thinks of Alexamenos' god.

We don't like division, but it will always be there because our Lord has said "This is it. There is only one way to heaven, and it is through me." But through Jesus, we have peace with God. We have peace with heaven. It is ours because God brought fire on earth, not on us, but on Jesus, for our sake. And because of that, yes, there will be the fires of division on this earth, but that should not deter us or keep us from speaking because we have peace, the good kind, with Jesus. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.