

**“Stop Arguing!!!”**  
August 18, 2019  
[Scripture Focus: Luke 12: 49 - 56]

**“I came to cast fire upon the earth. How I wish that it was already ablaze! I have a baptism I must experience. How I am distressed until it’s completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, I have come instead to bring division. From now on, a household of five will be divided—three against two and two against three. Father will square off against son and son against father; mother against daughter and daughter against mother; and mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”**

**Jesus also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud forming in the west, you immediately say, ‘It’s going to rain.’ And indeed it does. And when a south wind blows, you say, ‘A heat wave is coming.’ And it does. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret conditions on earth and in the sky. How is it that you don’t know how to interpret the present time?”**

I’ve got to be honest with you; When preparing for this message, I read this text and thought to myself “what in the world am I supposed to do with this?” I couldn’t find anything in my normal starting place (The Jesus Storybook Bible). Fortunately, when I turned to one of my sources for children’s message ideas, I found that they had a lesson for this text. Thank Goodness!

The lesson essentially said that Jesus knew that people would always be arguing about his teachings. Fathers and sons; mothers and daughters; even mother-in-law against daughter-in-law!

The lesson then said that people disagree about what Jesus is teaching because “we want what we want” and “we’ll do almost anything to get what we want; even to the detriment of relationships between fathers and sons; mothers and daughters and (as hard as it is to believe) even mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws.”

Ultimately, if what God wants doesn't happen to be what the people want, the people will provide a zillion reasons why we don't really understand what God's saying or God just doesn't understand or what we heard was God's old message (and was never intended for modern culture). Whatever the Bible used to say was for someone else - not us.

## SO WHAT?

I am not always the sharpest knife in the drawer but a solution that makes sense to me is when we don't know who to follow, just do what God wants us to do! I said that this is what makes sense to me. I didn't say that this is what I (always) do.

For those of you who think that sermons are always about preachers judging the congregations they're speaking to, please know that most often I preach to myself and assume that if I'm missing the mark, I'm probably not by myself. This is definitely the case today.

I used to try to trick God (who knows my every thought) or to make a deal with God (if you'll just get me out of this mess, I promise I'll never do anything stupid again). This negotiation is most often preceded by me doing something silly for the zillionth time and often followed by me doing something even sillier AGAIN.

So, there's this reality that most of us have a fairly clear understanding of what God really wants us to do. When Jesus was asked in Matthew 22 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment?" He replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' **Think about it; how easy would life be if we simply put loving God & our neighbor first?**

The arguing and confusion wouldn't exist. Honestly, it's no surprise that God wants us to put God first!

There's this reality that the location of the Christmas tree in the church had nothing to do with loving God or our neighbor. It had everything to do with wanting what we want and not being afraid to argue to get our way (since we usually do what we want and don't listen for God's will any how).

Sound familiar, parents? Can't you picture our Father in Heaven considering the great Christmas tree slobber-knocker, shaking his head and muttering under his breath "just stop arguing about the stinking tree and focus on what's really important"?

### NOW WHAT?

So, identifying the problem here isn't that hard. Fixing the problem? That's a little more complicated. In this morning's scripture, (a frustrated) Jesus essentially says "why do I bother telling you what to do when I know that ultimately you're just going to do whatever you wanted to do in the first place?"

I often find myself going back to this age-old question when I'm about to do something that I imagine might end up as a disaster: WWJD - (What Would Jesus Do?) or What Would Jesus Want Me To Do?

I know, I know... For even a moment, why would I trust myself to answer this question honestly (as God wants me to) when my inner voice almost always tends to speak for ME first and not God.

I think that I know when I'm trying to talk God into "my way" (instead of his). Maybe that's a good time to stop and seek guidance. Who should I ask? When I hear that

small voice inside my head saying “wait... that’s not a good idea.” Seems that starting with what God thinks might make more sense.

But most of us don’t really have the patience to wait for God’s answer to our questions (God never promised us responses in 24-hours). God’s not like a doc-in-a-box offering almost instant service. When we question God and don’t instantly hear an answer, most of us will act on the silence. We’ll press “send” on our prayer; wait the obligatory thirty seconds for God’s answer and then do whatever we want when we don’t instantly hear from that big voice in the sky.

When God doesn’t respond quickly enough for us, a reasonable option would be to ask a trusted and faithful friend what they think about the situation in question. For Presbyterians, this is part of our polity. We don’t have a pope or a bishop making decisions for us. We have ordained women and men (called elders) who act on and even sometimes confirm the correct path or answer - acknowledging God’s will.

When I was first ordained as an elder, I attended a local Presbytery meeting and was asked to vote on an issue. I had not been trained to know that I was to consider what I thought God wanted me to do; not what the congregation of the church I served wanted. I wasn’t a congressional representative. I was there to consider what I thought God wanted me to do and vote accordingly.

This is why I think it’s a good idea to ask a trusted friend (and person of faith) what they think; not someone who will agree with you (no matter what); ask someone who is not afraid to tell you the truth about what they think; what God thinks.

So, who do you trust to be completely honest with you? That person should be on the top of your go-to list of folks to ask when you’re not sure what to do next.

That's today's take-away: When you're faced with a dilemma, ask God what to do. When you're pressed into making a decision and you really have not yet heard from God (who may not answer you in the timeframe that fits your desire), go to a trusted, faithful friend (not someone who will always tell you exactly what you want to hear) and ask their advice.

But no matter what... STOP ARGUING!!! Stop arguing with your mother and daughter; your father and son; and stop arguing with your in-laws. Stop arguing with God. Stop arguing with folks on FaceBook. Stop arguing with those who's political opinions don't mirror yours. Stop arguing because a politician (republican, democrat or independent) makes you angry. Stop arguing because the talking head on CNN or Fox frustrates you.

Just stop arguing and be quiet for a minute. Start listening for a change. Stop pleading your case long enough to hear what someone (preferably God) has to say. Then, follow God's lead.

We have to make a choice to stop arguing. That's what Skylar and I did earlier in the service. Contrary to popular belief, no one can force me to argue with them. When you and your spouse are getting ready to disagree about something, you both can make a conscious choice NOT to have an argument or you can load your verbal weapons and fight to the death. Remember that no one can have an argument by themselves. Try it. It won't work!

At last month's quarterly Presbytery meeting I encouraged folks to stop arguing and to become part of "the solution" - rather than part of the problem.

God has given us all this gift of free choice. When something happens in your life that angers or frustrates you, you can choose to “stop arguing” and realize that whatever you’re getting ready to argue about may not even really be a big deal.

If the dishwasher was loaded incorrectly or your kid got home 5 minutes late from a date or your boss was a jerk to you or the church changed the color of something that was sacred to you or there was too much traffic this morning when you were driving in, just maybe it’s not that big of a deal. So, stop arguing (especially about the insignificant stuff) and focus on what’s important for God’s Kingdom.

In closing, fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, in-laws, outlaws, please just STOP ARGUING and focus your energy on Loving the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ And then ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Amen.