



Grain

“It is when we all play safe that we create a world of the utmost insecurity.” —Dag Hammarskjöld

Submitted by Vernita Kennen, Roseville, MN

Field

49 I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! 51 Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! 52 From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; 53 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 mother-in-law. Luke 12:49-53

Thoughts

“Don’t become a pastor.” My now former home congregation leader responded to my decision to go to seminary in a less than supportive manner. I was shocked. “Don’t become a pastor if you care about social justice.” He went on to explain as a pastor in the southern U.S., he has found social justice to be divisive within his congregation, and said it wasn’t worth the risk of losing members.

But doesn’t justice bring people together, too? Isn’t that what Jesus did? It was confusing and a little heartbreaking for me to hear this from someone whom I had hoped would be supportive of my decision to go to seminary. A strong sense of justice and urgency of grace in my own life had lead me to this point. And now I was being told to not become a pastor for the very reason I felt called to become one. Justice divides people. It is like fire spreading with urgency. It is a topic meant to be provocative and challenging in ministry, and in a time where church membership is dwindling, it’s easier to avoid talking about this potentially controversial or “dividing” part of our Christian witness.

Justice can also be tricky. How do we talk about justice without coming across as morally superior? How do we acknowledge who is missing from our conversations and not only invite them to the table, but also build welcoming relationships to reconcile and change systems which are unjust? We stay grounded in faith, looking to the ministry of Jesus as a model: he didn’t approach relationships from an “othering” perspective. Instead he met all people where they were. He walked into the fire of social justice advocacy in his ministry, knowing the risk of being divisive. Jesus’ ministry is revolutionary in both historical and modern context. Jesus wasn’t around to be a comfortable friend with whom everyone agreed. Jesus was sent to shake things up on earth, call people to live out a faith that commands us to love all people boldly, and light a fire within the world. To do justice. His ministry divided people to the point of his crucifixion. Jesus died for justice so that we might live in hope of eternal life to continue spreading such a provocative message of love and grace.

May your Monday be filled with fire as a reminder of the grace calling us to ministry in the world.
Happy Monday!

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Many Blessings upon you,

Kelsey Johnson, Hunger Advocacy Fellow