

If you're like me, there are times when you're reading something and you get taken by surprise. For instance, I was reading the Bible.

In Matthew 5:9, Jesus says “Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.”

In Luke 2:14, the heavenly host are saying “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men.”

And then I read:

*“Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!”*

Jesus said WHAT?

DIVISION?

...

It's as if a mother took her crippled child to a highly-rated orthopedist, and the doctor said “Did you think I can heal this boy's leg? No! I'm going to break it!”

I don't think Mom wants to hear that.

And if Jesus came to bring division, what can this mean for the UCC, which we say is called to be a united and uniting church? Are we on the wrong track?

It's not like we haven't seen division in the church.

In 1054, after many years of conflict over whether the Pope had authority over the Eastern churches patriarchs, the western and eastern churches split – the great East-West schism.

In 1517, Martin Luther writes a list of his top 95 issues with the church. Although Luther, a priest, only wanted to correct a few things, the church decides he shouldn't be a priest – or for that matter, alive. Protestantism begins soon after.

In the centuries since, the church has divided further into hundreds – if not thousands – of large and small denominations.

And in our own congregation's history, there was a time when a decision over the ideas of building a new church and joining a newly-created denomination caused division.

*So what is Jesus after anyway?*

Maybe the answer lies in the text leading up to this exclamation.

Remember that, up until now, Jesus has been preaching – and people show up to listen to him preach. Jesus has been healing – and people show up to be healed. Jesus has been confronting religious leaders – and people show up to watch the debate.

It's summer, and a lot of you are probably out grilling. How many of you grill with charcoal?

Ever have trouble getting a charcoal grill to light? It's as if the charcoal briquettes in your grill are saying to the match:

*“Go match! Cook that food with your flame!”*

The match is waiting for the briquettes to get involved.

Jesus is looking for more than just showing up. Jesus is looking for people to get involved.

Jesus is ready to start something: a radical change in ideas that will leap from person to person like a flame. He is looking forward to the day when people will commit to spreading the word.

*"I come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!"*

And what happens when people get fired up?

We can imagine a family where life is based on centuries of tradition, and someone comes in with a new idea. Maybe some of you remember times in your families when someone wanted to change the way something was done.

Dad or mom could yell. The kids could decide you're changing things to be mean. Someone might just think you're crazy – or possessed by demons.

You have to be pretty excited about something to make waves like that.

Yet that's the kind of excitement, the kind of investment, the kind of risk that Jesus is looking for.

I have a confession to make here:

I do not like conflict.

I tend to avoid it. I'm afraid of strong words, yelling, and loud noises.

So I tend to want to tread lightly and not upset anyone.

But that's not what Jesus is looking for.

In the Revelation of John, chapter 3 verses 14 and 15, it is written "*I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*"

That's a pretty strong indictment of my sort of behavior.

So I have to take some risks. I have to care enough – pro or con on an issue – to risk a little of the pain of people disagreeing with me.

The crippled child I mentioned earlier – the one who was brought to the orthopedist? Well, the doctor did break the leg. It turns out there had been a problem with the way the bone had been growing – it might have been from birth, or maybe from a previously unknown fracture that set wrong – and the doctor broke the bone so it could be set right. And the child cried in pain, and Mom was in tears that her child had to suffer.

We're often like that bone. It's not that people always agree, they just keep their disagreements hidden. I might think something is very important, but I'll keep my mouth shut so I don't make waves. It might be that I think we should do a new thing, or it might be that I think a new idea has problems. But I'll just keep quiet and not get involved.

Of course, we don't heal our differences by keeping quiet. We just build resentment until one day we just can't take it anymore. I might start yelling at someone – apparently over nothing. Or I might just stop coming to church because I feel like I'm not heard – even though I never bothered to speak up.

But if we speak up, we will find disagreement. And disagreement *can* lead to division.

That child's leg eventually healed – the child's own bone healed itself. Fragment reached to fragment and knitted together. The doctor could not heal the leg, only break it. The body itself had to do the healing.

Jesus didn't come to make everyone agree and be peaceful. Jesus's intent is not to get everyone to calm down. Jesus wants us to be involved, to care, to speak up about what's important...

...and then to reach out in reconciliation.

Jesus talks about reconciliation too.

In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus says “[...] if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

We might agree, which is consensus. We might both give in a little, which is compromise. One of us might decide the other is right, which is becoming

convinced. Or we might just have to agree to disagree on an issue.

But once we come to a *respectful* resolution, we have the beginnings of true healing – of true peace.

We, the body of Christ, must do the healing. We must be the blessed peacemakers, the children of God.

So what's on your mind?

I know some of you have come forward with passion for people in need, or the needs of our church. I'm sure many others are like me: nervous about making waves.

This very week I go away for an orientation retreat at Seminary. I know I'm going to get some homework, so I'm not letting you off the hook.

This week, please pray and meditate about the important things – in this world, this church, your home, or your work. And if something is missing, if there is something that needs help, if there is something you honestly feel is off track...

...pray for the courage to speak, and the wisdom to speak lovingly. Be ready for a little pain – people may disagree. They may even ask:

You said WHAT?!

But also be ready to participate in the healing. Jesus won't force growth, healing, and peace on us. We have to reach out and do it.

You know what the weather's like. Do you know what else is going on right now?

Get fired up about it.