

Third Sunday of Easter - May 4, 2025

Acts 8:1–12 (or Judith 9:1–14); Psalm 74:1–12; Ephesians 6:10–18; Luke 12:49–53

Multiplication and Division

1. I have never preached a sermon about math and there may be at least one math teacher and possibly an accountant in the congregation who are happy I finally will.
 - a. Only, it's just kind of about math.
 - b. You would be excused if you saw the scripture for today and were a bit taken back.
 - i. We tend to think of Jesus as a figure of love, of bringing together, of unity.
 - ii. Of addition, if you would: God plus Jesus plus the Holy Spirit equals love
 - iii. Or, come and be my disciple: you plus you plus you plus you.
 - iv. Or, if you're getting really fancy? Multiplication!
 1. Multiplying food to serve 5,000 people
 2. Multiplying the impact of healing Jesus did through enabling 12 disciples to do what Jesus could do and sending them out.
 - v. And if you're really going for extra credit, you would point out that Jesus was sometimes about subtraction, about take away.
 1. Because you would quote me a passage when Jesus says “carry your cross and following me.” And some people left right then.
 2. Or when Jesus taught that his body was the flesh we would eat and the blood we would drink, people were grossed out and started subtracting themselves from the group of followers.
 - vi. But today's passage is clearly talking about division.
 1. And the question is why Jesus would be talking like this
 2. It's hard to hear that he would be here to bring division among those around him
 - c. Well, let me tell you about a scene from one of my favorite movies, The Matrix
 - i. It is a science fiction movie, the first in a three-part series.
 - ii. The movie is set here on earth, and at first it all seems normal, boring even, but there is something about the world that isn't quite right.
 - iii. You can't quite put your finger on it.
 - iv. In The Matrix there is a character whose name is Morpheus, who has exclusive knowledge about reality, about the truth about life, that is somehow hidden from other people
 - v. Then there's another character, his name is Neo, who shows the potential not just of understanding that true secret knowledge, that truth about life,
 1. but then also Neo shows signs of being a leader, the person who would lead a change in the world for good.
 - vi. When Morpheus is about to explain this secret knowledge to Neo, this knowledge that would explain the reasons behind the world as it appeared and as it TRULY was, Morpheus gives Neo a choice.
 1. Dramatically, Morpheus offers Neo a choice of taking one of two pills
 2. “This is your last chance. After this there is no turning back.
 3. If you take the blue pill, the story ends; you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe.
 4. Or you take the red pill, and you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes

5. All I'm offering is the truth. Nothing more"
 6. Neo chooses to know the truth, the real truth, and his life would never again be the same.
2. Think of Jesus as telling people they needed to make that decision: blue pill or red pill
 - a. When Jesus was preaching and teaching, without as much as a warning he started giving everyone a red pill, a pill of discovery, of opening their eyes.
 - b. He spelled out what the realm of God was really about
 - i. What God really wants from us.
 - ii. Not that Jesus was saying that all religious practices that had come before him were wrong
 - iii. But Jesus was saying that people had become accustomed to a way of filtering the truth from God through human eyes
 1. They were focused on who's in and who's out, where in fact God's message was about love that knows no bounds
 2. They were emphasizing power and control, where in fact God's message was one of grace and community
 3. In other words, they had gotten off track
 - iv. And so actually when Jesus is preaching he is bringing them back to the vision of God's realm, and so picture it as Jesus saying: I've come to guide you back to the true knowledge of God and give you power to do God's work
 - v. And once you come to believe in me and in my message, your eyes will be forever opened, and you won't be able to go back to the way things were.
 - c. So if we understand what Jesus was saying and doing, we realize there were some who signed on and some who rejected him
 - i. Thus it makes sense that he was in fact bringing division among them.
 - ii. Jesus hadn't come to fit in with those in power, or to dumb down the Bible so nobody would be offended, lowering everything to the least common denominator
 1. (See what I did there? My high school math teacher would be proud).
 - iii. Jesus taught (and lived out) a message of courageous love, of God's amazing grace, and of a future together breaking down barriers
 - iv. Those in power didn't trust him. Those on the margins believed in him.
 - v. People said he taught like no one had before. But to follow him meant to take the risks which come from serving selflessly, from calling out injustice, from loving our neighbor as ourselves, and even loving our enemy.
 - vi. You can see why some even within a family would agree with Jesus, or not
 - vii. But it is a division because now things are clear. This is the way of Jesus. You can choose it or not.
 - d. Once we know what the right thing to do is, we can choose to do it or not, but we'll always know deep down what the right thing is.
 - e. Once we know the way Jesus turns the world upside down with courageous love and mercy, with siding with people pushed aside by society, we can choose to pretend his message was about something else, but deep down we'll know otherwise
 - f. That creates division (at times even within ourselves!)

But God is patient and kind, and clear. And the bottom line is, when you add it all together, God loves us, and always welcomes us back just as Jesus showed us And continues to show us.