



# Potomac Hills

## Community Church, PCA

RELEVANT • RELATIONAL • REAL

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## What Jesus said about Being Ready

“Revealed Grace” - a series from Luke  
**Luke 12:49-53**

### **INTRODUCTION: “Does God Dance on Your Potato Chips?”<sup>1</sup>**

Karen Linamen, in her book, Just Hand Over The Chocolate And No One Will Get Hurt, (isn't that a great title!), writes about having one of those really bad days. Listen to what she says ...

“Not too long ago I had "one of those days". I was feeling pressure from a writing deadline. I had company arriving in a couple days and the toilet was clogged. I went to the bank, and the trainee teller processing my deposit had to start over three times. I swung by the supermarket to pick up a few things and the lines were serpentine. By the time I got home, I was frazzled and sweaty and in a hurry to get something on the table for dinner.

Deciding on Campbell's Cream of Mushroom Soup, I grabbed a can opener, cranked open the can, then remembered I had forgotten to buy milk at the store. Nix the soup idea. Setting the can aside, I went to plan B, which was leftover baked beans. I grabbed a Tupperware from the fridge, popped the seal, took a look and groaned.

My husband isn't a picky eater, but even HE won't eat baked beans that look like caterpillars. Really frustrated, now, I decided on a menu that promised to be as foolproof as it is nutrition-free: hot dogs and potato chips. Retrieving a brand new bag of chips from the cupboard, I grabbed the cellophane and gave a hearty pull. The bag didn't open.

I tried again.

Nothing happened.

I took a breath, doubled my muscle, and gave the bag a hearty wrestle.

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<sup>1</sup> The introduction is adapted from, Just Hand over the Chocolate and No One Will Get Hurt by Karen Linamen.

With a loud pop, the cellophane suddenly gave way, ripping wide from top to bottom. Chips flew sky high.

I was left holding the bag, and it was empty.

It was the last straw.

I let out a blood-curdling scream. "I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE!!!"

My husband heard my unorthodox cry for help. Within minutes he was standing at the doorway to the kitchen, where he surveyed the damage:

An opened can of soup, melting groceries, moldy baked beans, and one quivering wife standing ankle deep in potato chips. My husband did the most helpful thing he could think of at the moment. He took a flying leap, landing flat-footed in the pile of chips. And then he began to stomp and dance and twirl, grinding those chips into my linoleum in the process!

I stared.

I fumed.

Pretty soon I was working to stifle a smile.

Eventually I had to laugh.

And finally I decided to join him.

I, too, took a leap onto the chips.

And then I danced.

Now I'll be the first to admit that my husband's response wasn't the one I was looking for. But the truth is, it was exactly what I needed.

I didn't need a cleanup crew as much as I needed an attitude adjustment, and the laughter from that rather funky moment provided just that.

So now I have a question for you, and it's simply this:

Has God ever stomped on your chips?

I know that, in my life, there have been plenty of times when I've gotten myself into frustrating situations and I've cried out for help, all the while hoping God would show up with a celestial broom and clean up the mess I've made.

What often happens instead is that God dances on my chips, answering my prayer in a completely different manner than I had expected, but in the manner that is best for me after all.

Sometimes I can see right away that God's response was the best one after all. Sometimes I have to wait weeks or months before I begin to understand how and why God answered a particular prayer the way he did. There are even some situations that, years later, I'm still trying to understand. I figure God will fill me in sooner or later, either this side of Heaven or beyond.

Do I trust Him?

Even when He's answering my prayers in a way that is completely different from my expectations?

Even when He's dancing and stomping instead of sweeping and mopping?  
 Can I embrace what He's offering?  
 Can I let His joy adjust my attitude?  
 Am I going to stand on the sidelines and sulk, or am I willing to learn the steps of the dance He's dancin' with my needs in mind?  
 I'll be honest with you: Sometimes I sulk. Sometimes I dance.  
 I'm working on doing more of the latter than the former.  
 I guess the older I get the more I realize that He really does know what He's doing. He loves me and I can trust Him.  
 Even when the chips are down.”

That's a great story.  
 We've been working our way through the Gospel of Luke and now we've gotten to one of those really hard passages.  
 One of those texts that no preacher ever chooses to preach on.  
 One of those texts that leave you wondering ...  
 A) What is Jesus talking about?  
 And 2) Is this really the Jesus that I know, that I'm familiar with?  
 He has just been talking with the disciples and with this huge crowd of would be followers. He's talked about greed and worry and obedience and being ready for His coming again.  
 And most of His followers **buy** into all that stuff.  
 Most of them **agree** that greed and worry are bad and obedience and being ready are good. It makes sense ... we're with you ... so far, so good.  
 And then He bursts their bubble ... or pops their bag of chips.  
 And while they're standing there with their jaws open, trying to figure all this out, He's figuratively dancing on their chips.  
 What Jesus says is not what anyone expects.  
 It sounds mean.  
 It sounds harsh.  
 It sounds like someone **else**.  
 And then He doesn't explain it!  
 He just walks on their chips saying, “Do you **trust** Me?”  
 “Do you **believe** Me even when you don't understand Me?”  
 “Will you **follow** Me even when I don't answer your prayers the way you think I should?”  
 “When you can't explain what's going on will you **stay or will you leave?**”  
 Listen to Jesus' words and you can see why they left His listeners standing ankle deep in verbal potato chips.

**Luke 12:49-53**, *“I have come to bring fire to the earth, and I wish that my task were already completed! [50] There is a terrible baptism ahead of Me, and I am under a heavy burden until it is accomplished. [51] Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? **No, I have come to bring strife and division!** [52] From now on families will be split apart, three in favor of Me, and two against—or the other way around. [53] There will be a division between father and son, mother and daughter, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.”*

Well now, wasn't that fun?

This is one of those hard sayings of Jesus.

**v. 49-53: Peace Only Comes After Division.**<sup>2</sup>

There are few other speeches of Jesus that catch us more off-guard than this one. No one would deny that these are some of the most intense words of Jesus we find in the Bible. It would follow that any reader of these words, including those who believe in Jesus, would probably want some kind of explanation.

Frankly, the Lord seems to be shouting at the top of his voice here. A little later we will talk about the deeper meaning behind the words that capture our ears here, phrases like, *“Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? **No, I have come to bring strife and division!**”*

Coming from Jesus, these words demand explanation, because we expect Jesus to say the opposite of what we hear Him saying here.

But for now let's try to understand these words in light of what was going on in Jesus' life at the time. That is true of all of us, isn't it?

When something significant is going on in our lives, our demeanor and speech reflect it. Our words, usually spoken calmly, may develop an unpleasing bite that betrays the fact that we're on edge.

We understand that and allow for it in one another. Or we should.

So we discover that the words of Jesus have a bite to them.

He appears to be on edge.

What's up?

Jesus is worked up, that's what's up.

His mind seems focused on the consuming event to come: His own crucifixion. Jesus often thought and spoke about that "hour." He knew that His mission on earth involved the cross. He would suffer and die for the sins of His people. That was His mission, and He knew the time was coming.

So, Jesus often had the cross in the back of His mind when He was speaking publicly or with His disciples. That seems to be the case here. He is talking with

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<sup>2</sup> Much of the exposition is adapted from *Preaching the Word: Luke, Volume Two* by R. Kent Hughes, pages 67-72. Parts are adapted from "Peace and the Peacemakers," a sermon by Richard W. Patt, and "Our Splintered World," a sermon by Carveth Mitchell, both found on [www.eSermons.com](http://www.eSermons.com)

His disciples about living their lives in total commitment to God. The longer He talks about it, the more the subject excites Him. All of a sudden He seems to shift the focus to Himself, having reminded Himself of the total commitment that was soon to be demanded of Him ... at the cross. These realities stir Him deeply. The disciples don't see all of this. They couldn't see it, and Jesus doesn't blame them. But the emotion of it sweeps over Him and he spills forth ...

*"I have come to bring fire to the earth, and I wish that my task were already completed! There is a terrible baptism ahead of Me, and I am under a heavy burden until it is accomplished. Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? **No, I have come to bring strife and division!**"*

Then he goes on to detail how houses will be divided and relatives set against one another. **Strong** words, **dramatic** images.

The second reason Jesus was all worked up here is the fact that the "hour of the cross" was quickly approaching. Geographically speaking, at this juncture Jesus is making His final swing through territory that would land Him in Jerusalem for His ultimate confrontation with His enemies, which would lead to His crucifixion.

So this is a background that we need to appreciate as we hear these startling words from Jesus. When we look more closely there is a deeper meaning to these words, a meaning we urgently need to appreciate as people involved (as Jesus was) in proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

We can get at this meaning by recalling that most of us would probably have expected Jesus to say exactly the opposite of what in fact he does say here.

When Jesus says, *"I have come to bring fire to the earth..."* wouldn't we have expected Jesus to say, "I came to put out fire upon the earth"?

Or when Jesus asks, *"Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth?"* most of us would have been inclined to answer, "Yes! Yes, peace instead of division. Yes, peace on earth, good will toward men. Merry Christmas!"

So what is the meaning of all this, when in fact we hear Jesus announce that He came to bring fire upon the earth and division instead of peace? He meant to tell us that our mission of peacemaking will **always** bring the sword slingers out of the closet. Most of the apostles were martyred at the hands of those who became unnerved by these messengers of peace. Those whose mission was to bring the peace of God often brought the sword upon themselves through no fault of their own; they brought a fire upon the earth that frequently consumed their own lives.

We know the reason for these disastrous responses to the proclamation of the Gospel. The reason is that a division of sorts boils within the heart of every human being. We are people filled with pride and selfishness. We become easily stuck on ourselves -- stuck on the way we look, the way we do things, the culture

we've developed, the foods we eat, the neighborhoods we live in, and the protective economic network we've devised for ourselves and for those who are like us and who go along with our ways.

Stuck on themselves, it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to honor anyone else, let alone someone who claims to be the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

You know how Jesus had to deal with that in his day. We have to deal with it in our day as well. And the Church of Jesus Christ ought to deal with it, for only the Church possesses a power that can break down such walls between people.

What we treasure in Word and Sacrament is nothing less than God's transforming grace that finally gets the focus off ourselves.

What only the Church possesses is the message of the cross, and the cross is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.

In the cross, we are saved from ourselves, first of all. We are no longer stuck on our selfish viewpoints. The cross burns that all off as we are ignited by the realization that the great God of heaven has given up everything in our behalf. The Gospel of Jesus Christ frees us from ourselves!

The cross tells us God loved us to the degree that God saw us as valued sons and daughters. God saw us from a Father's heart. God makes peace in our hearts in a way that allows us to become peacemakers in a world of tumult and godless uproar.

Almost everyone is in favor of peace; very few are peacemakers.

The peacemaker is willing to do something very painful: to live with the uprooting that making authentic peace often requires.

For instance, there will be no authentic spiritual peace in a person's heart until sin is dealt with. Sin must be uprooted and cast out. Christ bore that upheaval (and pain!). He gives us the grace to tolerate the pain of repentance.

The lack of peace between two human beings sometimes is overcome only when both are willing to cool their anger so that they are enabled to reconcile. Often the most painful thing for us is to swallow our pride. Again, Christ's forgiveness gives us the grace to tolerate the swallowing.

Peace is hard work, it doesn't mean tolerating everything, often it means not tolerating something. Peace normally comes as a result of warfare. And that's just as true in the spiritual realm as it is in the physical realm.

You want peace? You gotta deal with your sin.

You want peace? You gotta deal with your family.

You want peace? You gotta deal with your friends.

You want peace? You gotta do the hard work of recognizing the differences and dealing with them.

You can't gloss them over in the name of peace.

Because Jesus forces you into one camp or the other.

There are those who try to be neutral toward him; like Pilate, who said in **Matthew 27:24**, "*Pilate saw that he wasn't getting anywhere and that a riot was developing. So he sent for a bowl of water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this man. The responsibility is yours!"*"

Or like Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night and called him "a teacher come from God" and got a sermon on commitment for his trouble (John 3:2);

Or like some today who try to say that Jesus is a good man - but only that and nothing more.

Neutrality toward Jesus is not possible, as Pilate discovered.

Every person must come down on one side or the other.

Jesus said in **Matthew 12:30**, "*Anyone who isn't helping Me opposes Me, and anyone who isn't working with Me is actually working against Me.*"

No matter how we try to delude ourselves in the attempt, there can be no neutrality toward Jesus. Every person must come down on one side or the other.

Well ...

The Twelve were shocked.

The crowd was silenced.

He definitely had their attention.

But this was, and is, the reality.

The very mention of Jesus' name tore ancient Israel and Judaism apart.

During the first 400 years of the Roman Empire, speaking His name could land you in jail, or worse.

To most of the world's other religions, the name Jesus has been strident and invasive. In the last 70 years, allegiance to Jesus could land one in a Chinese prison. To convert to Christ carries the death penalty in most Islamic countries. The persecution of Christians around the world today is overwhelming. I get at least one email **everyday** about the persecuted church around the world.

There are Christians who are dying this morning because they love the name Jesus. Martin and Grace Burnham are suffering as hostages to terrorists in the Philippines because they are American missionaries.

And it's not just global, it's also personal.

The name of Jesus Christ always produces some type of painful division, even in the most personal of relationships.

Jesus words in **John 14:6**, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Me.*" are offensive to a pluralistic society.

Jesus did not come to tell people that all paths lead to God.

Jesus did not come to tell people that what you believe doesn't matter.

Jesus did not say that all people are basically good, and He didn't preach the perfectibility of humanity.

Jesus didn't say that you can do whatever you want as long as you don't hurt anyone else.

His ethics are dramatic and radical.

He demands careful obedience and costly loyalty.

And not everyone is willing to pay the price or accept those who do.

If you attempt to follow Christ, you'll experience division.

Now it's also true that many Christians suffer not because they follow Jesus but because they're judgmental, rude, self-righteous buffoons.

But it's also a fact, according to **2 Timothy 3:12**, that "*...everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*"

And sometimes the division and persecution come from those we love.

And that's a hard saying ... then and now.

**CONCLUSION: "Lousy Beer, Worse Theology."**<sup>3</sup>

A number of years ago, the president of Boston University, John Silber, spoke out against the self-centered hedonism he observed in our culture: "The gospel preached during every television show is 'You only go around once in life, so get all the gusto you can.' It is a statement about theology; it is a statement about beer. It's lousy beer and even worse theology."

Jesus spoke to his followers, and encouraged them to travel light and lead lives that were uncluttered with "stuff" ... "Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff."

There is nothing wrong with a bag, tunic, sandals or walking stick, but they are just something else that can distract us, weigh us down, and demand some of our attention. Jesus tells us here in Luke 12 that we aren't supposed to worry about our life, our food, or what we will wear.

And as Brennan Manning points out in his book, The Signature of Jesus, "In the same chapter, Jesus depicts a man who is busy building bigger barns and calls him a fool. All these sayings are cautions, loving encouragement from Jesus not to get distracted, waylaid, and ambushed by stuff that moth and rust consume and that has no enduring value. A Christian's simplicity of life is striking proof that he has found what he seeks, that he has stumbled onto the treasure hidden in the field."

"Our lives in the global village have grown overly complex and overly crowded. New obligations grow overnight like Jack's beanstalk. Our days

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<sup>3</sup> Conclusion adapted from by "DayBreaks," an email newsletter by Galen C. Dalrymple, 01/23/02. The lengthy quote is from The Signature of Jesus by Brennan Manning.

become a never-ending succession of appointments, meetings, burdens and responsibilities. We are too busy to smell the flowers, to waste time with our spouses, to befriend our children, to cultivate true friends, or to be friends to those who have no friends. Our children's schools demand our time; the civic problems of our community need our attention. Our professional status, our playtime, our membership in various organizations stake their claims."

"Weary and breathless, we sense that life is slipping away. We change our wardrobe, slip into the costume for the next performance, and regret that we have tasted so little of the peace and joy that Jesus promised. What of prayer, silence, solitude, and simple presence of the indwelling God? Well, I'll get around to it, but not today. This week is just too full."

"The fallacy here is blaming the complexity of our lives on the complexity of our environment...simplicity of life does not depend upon simplicity of environment. The real problem lies within. Outer distractions reflect a lack of inner integration. We are trying to be several selves at once...we have been neglecting Jesus' invitation to 'Come to the water and quench your thirst.' It is a hint that there is a way of life more satisfying than our hurried pace."

"Let us suppose it were so ordained that your eternal destiny was to depend on your personal relationship with a spiritual leader you know. Would you not arrange to spend a little more time with that person than you presently do?"

"There are certain questions that every Christian must answer in utter candor: Do you hunger for Jesus Christ? Do you yearn to spend time alone with Him in prayer? Is He the most important person in your life? Does He fill your soul like a song of joy? Is He on your lips as a shout of praise? Do you eagerly turn to His memoirs, His Testament, to learn more of Him? Are you making the effort to die daily to anything and everything that inhibits, threatens, or diminishes your friendship?"

"To discern where you really are with the Lord, recall what saddened you the past week.

Was it the realization that you don't love Jesus enough?

That you neglected opportunities to show compassion for another?

Or did you get depressed over lack of recognition, criticism from an authority figure, finances, lack of friends, fears about the future, your bulging waistline?"

"On the other hand, what gladdened you the past week?

The joy of slowly praying, 'Abba, Father'?

The afternoon you stole away for an hour with the Scriptures as your only companion?

A small victory over selfishness?

Or were the sources of your joy a car, clothes, a movie and a pizza?  
Are you worshipping idols?"

"When disciples surrender to the mystery of the fire of the Spirit that burns within, when we submit to the truth that we reach life only through death, when we acknowledge that the grain of wheat must vanish into the ground, that Jonah must be buried in the belly of the whale, that the alabaster jar of self must be broken if others are to perceive the sweet fragrance of Christ, when we respond to the call of Jesus, which is not come to church or a prayer meeting but 'Come to Me,' then the limitless power of the Holy Spirit will be unleashed with astonishing force."

Where is your heart?

What gladdens you?

What saddens you?

Does it please God?"

How different we are from the totally deaf man who went to church faithfully every Sunday. There was no interpretation in sign language, and he couldn't hear a word that was said or sung. One day one of his "non-church" friends wrote him a note asking why he went to church all the time when he couldn't hear anything. The deaf man replied, "I don't want there to be any doubt about which side I'm on."

Can there be any doubt as to which side you are on?

We cannot force the Christian life on others, but if we are true to our witness for Jesus we can do our best to exhibit it and make it attractive to others. Our witness is not to condemn, but to invite - to tell in words and show in deeds what Jesus means to us; to tell and show with kindly conviction the strengthening power of our prayer and Bible study, and let the Holy Spirit use it as He will.

One man came to church and asked how to join. He said, "A friend of mine has a joy and strength in his life that I sorely need in mine. He says he gets it here. I need the Lord that he has." Are people attracted to Christ by what they see in us and hear from us?

Jesus isn't teaching anything new in Luke 12.

He's telling us to be ready.

We're ready when we're busy obeying God.

And we're able to obey God when we depend on Him.

And we can depend on Him when we **really** believe what He says.

No matter how hard.

Even if we have to go through division and strife to get to peace.

Why?

Because it's all of Grace from beginning to end.

And all who need it said, "Amen."