

A different kind of division (Luke 12:49-56)

Where there is a rending, there is a healing not far behind.

by [Paul Lutter](#)

August 12, 2022

To receive these posts by email each Monday, [sign up](#).

For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.

What time is it? This question sits in the hearts and minds of many as the world, the church, and all who are in them seem to fall apart.

Jesus chastises his audience—calls us all a bunch of hypocrites!—because of where we place our attention. It's not hard to imagine people wanting to look away, given that Jesus defines his ministry in terms of division. Isn't there enough of this in the world? In our families? Within us? If it's true that he "came to bring fire to the earth," many may scatter to look for a fire extinguisher.

The Jesus we meet in these verses is far from conflict avoidant. Rather, Jesus came to divide, to separate, and to tear apart. Yet where there is a rending, there is also a healing (*sozo*) not far behind.

For the time that Jesus drives people to consider isn't what they think. When is it ever? For while division is often marked by a clock and calendar (*chronos*), the kind of division Jesus brings is different. With these words, Jesus ushers us into a time (*kairos*) of wholeness and new life. It is a time in which relationships are reconfigured around justice and righteousness. It is a time for grace and hope.

When I stand behind the table and preside at the meal, I listen to the crack of the wafer divided into two. As I pull the two pieces apart, I see the community, a people whose lives are fractured and broken, who long for God's time of healing and

wholeness, of forgiveness and life to re-member them by rewriting their story.

We are now members of God's household, God's family, God's community of the beloved. This stuns and surprises us. We're not quite sure how or why this happens. But we're glad that it has and that it will forever be true. We who are broken and torn apart are made new in ways that awaken us to God's activity and movement among and around us.

As I hand the wafer and the cup to those whose hands are cupped, I often wonder what goes through their mind. When we hear, "The body of Christ, given for you," and, "The blood of Christ, shed for you," do we know what is happening?

In these words, as God is grasped in, with, and under bread and wine, we are divided from our sin and from death itself. There, our stories are rewritten. We are joined to life, yes, and forgiveness. But we are also joined to compassion and mercy, to righteousness and justice, to hope and healing.

In this story, we are called into the world in order to work for a justice that brings healing and wholeness. For the time (*kairos*) that attends us is saturated in a hope larger than life. We join our voices with the cries of the world, trusting that God promises to be in those spaces, places, and communities in which there seems to be no earthly hope. We stand alongside the marginalized and listen to their stories. And we speak out and up, for there is another way.

The story we tell is hospitable in a way that all stories are welcome, and all people are received.