

SERMON God's Justice, Christ's Fire, and Our Call to Discernment

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Let us pray: Gracious God, open our hearts and minds to your Word this morning. May the ancient texts speak new truth into our lives, challenging us, comforting us, and equipping us to live as your faithful disciples in this complex world. Amen.

We live in a world that often feels fractured, a world where the headlines scream of injustice, inequality, and division. It can be overwhelming, leaving us wondering where God is, and what our role as people of faith truly is. Today, our scriptures offer us a powerful, albeit challenging, lens through which to view these realities: God's unwavering commitment to justice, the purifying and passionate fire of Christ, and our urgent call to moral discernment in our own time.

Let us first turn our attention to Psalm 82.

This is a dramatic scene, isn't it? God, the ultimate Judge, stands in the "divine council," not among heavenly beings, but in the midst of human rulers, judges, and those entrusted with power. These are the "gods" or "sons of the Most High" mentioned in verse 6 – not divine beings in the sense of Yahweh, but those who, by virtue of their position, were meant to reflect God's own justice and authority on earth.

But what does God find? An indictment of those human judges and rulers. "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?" God demands. The charge is clear: those in power have failed in their most fundamental duty. They have neglected the "weak and fatherless," the "afflicted and destitute," the "weak and needy." Instead of vindicating them, instead of doing justice, they have allowed the wicked to oppress the powerless. The Psalmist laments that "all the foundations of the earth are shaken" because of this pervasive injustice.

This Psalm reminds us that God is not a distant, detached deity. God is intimately concerned with how justice is administered on earth, especially for the most vulnerable. God's heart beats for the marginalized, for those without a voice, for those crushed by systems of oppression. And there is a stern warning for those who wield power: despite their earthly authority, they are mortal. They will die like men, and they will be held accountable by the true sovereign Judge. The Psalm ends with a fervent plea: "Arise, O God, judge the earth! For You possess all the nations."

This is a cry for God's ultimate justice to prevail, to set right what human institutions have made wrong.

Now, let us hold that image of God's passionate demand for justice as we turn to the words of Jesus in Luke 12:49-56. These are not the gentle, comforting words we often associate with Jesus.

"I have come to cast fire upon the earth," He declares, "and how I wish it were already kindled!" And then, even more startlingly, "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division."

What kind of fire is Jesus talking about? Not a destructive, annihilating fire, but a Holy fire. This is the fire of purification, the fire of passion, the consuming zeal of God's kingdom breaking into the world. It is the fire that burns away complacency, hypocrisy, and injustice. It is the fire of the Holy Spirit, igniting hearts with truth and courage. Jesus yearns for this fire to be kindled, to spread, to transform.

And the division? This is not arbitrary conflict or the promotion of discord for its own sake. This is the inevitable division that occurs when light shines into darkness.

When the radical demands of God's kingdom – demands for justice, love, mercy, and truth – confront the status quo, division is a natural consequence.

Choosing to follow Christ, to embrace His holy fire, often means standing apart from the values and priorities of the world, even from those closest to us. It means aligning ourselves with God's justice, even when it is unpopular or uncomfortable. The family divisions Jesus describes are a stark illustration of the profound, personal cost of discipleship when the kingdom of God becomes paramount.

So, how do we bring these two powerful passages together for our time? Psalm 82 calls us to recognize God's profound concern for justice and to lament the widespread failures of human systems. Luke 12 tells us that Christ's coming ignites a holy fire within us, a passion for truth and righteousness that may, by its very nature, create division.

This brings us to Jesus' final words in our Luke passage: "You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time?" Jesus challenges His listeners – and us – to exercise moral discernment.

We are adept at reading the weather signs, at predicting earthly phenomena. But are we equally adept at reading the "signs of the times" in our spiritual and moral landscape?

In our day, this call to discernment is more critical than ever. It's not enough to simply react to events; we are called to understand them through the lens of God's justice and Christ's kingdom.

Where do we see the foundations of the earth shaken by injustice, as in Psalm 82? Where is the cry of the weak and needy going unheard? And where is Christ's holy fire calling us to purify, to challenge, to stand for truth, even if it means division?

This is not about aligning with a particular political party or ideology, but about aligning with God's heart for justice. It means asking:

Are we advocating for fair systems for all, especially the vulnerable?

Are we speaking out against oppression, even when it is uncomfortable?

Are we allowing Christ's fire to burn away our own apathy and complacency?

Are we discerning what God is doing in our communities, our nation, and our world, and responding faithfully?

The fire of Christ compels us not to be silent in the face of injustice, but to be agents of God's transforming love and righteousness. It means having the courage to stand for what is right, even when it creates tension, even when it means we might be misunderstood. It means praying, "Arise, O God, judge the earth!" and then, by the power of the Holy Spirit, being willing to be part of God's answer to that prayer.

May we, as a people of God, be those who are ignited by Christ's holy fire, who actively pursue God's justice, and who possess the wisdom and courage to discern the signs of our time, responding faithfully to God's call.

Let us pray:

Holy God, we confess that we often fail to see the injustices around us, or we lack the courage to act. Forgive us. Kindle your holy fire within us, Lord Jesus, that we may be passionate about your justice and truth. Grant us wisdom to discern the signs of our time, and the courage to stand for what is right, even when it is difficult. May your kingdom come, and your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.