

Luke 12: 49 – 56

'Stress and the Signs of the Times'

Introduction ...

Stress and vulnerability – that's what we see in Jesus from today's Gospel passage.

He knows what lies ahead of him – the Baptism to which he refers is his death – so there is definitely vulnerability along with the understandable stress.

And he erupts: along the lines of **'Do you not get it yet?'**

Indeed, as we then hear his words about peace and division perhaps we're aware that we don't get it yet ...

Isn't Jesus the **Prince of Peace** ... doesn't he often say **Peace be with you?**

The Peace of Jesus ...

Yes – he does – but this peace is a gift from him – elsewhere we read of Jesus saying: **'My peace I give you'**

Herein lies a clue ... true peace is a gift from Jesus ... and those who turn against him reject that peace along with so much else.

Jesus and his message provoke ... need ... a reaction ... and if people have different reactions – that is bound to cause division.

Whatever you thought about Oprah Winfrey's now infamous interview with Harry and Megan, it projected to the world the fragility of family, the complexity of familial relationships and how quickly things can fall apart.

Many of us will have a story about a family rift. Some family divisions last for decades and can even be passed down from generation to generation. Clearly, there are many and complex reasons for a family fall-out, but one of them stems from fundamental differences of opinion. During the Brexit vote, several news outlets carried statistics about the impact of the vote on family harmony. It is thought that disagreement on the politics of Brexit led to one in 20 people falling out with their family. You may recall that Boris Johnson's own brother, Jo, famously left the government citing irreconcilable tension within himself over family loyalties and the national interest. However, when a family member moves beyond expressing different opinions and starts to live in a way that others don't understand, or follows a set of beliefs not shared by the rest of the family, things can get really hard for everyone.

Today's Gospel reading portrays something of the difficulties of holding a deep set of beliefs that is at odds with the people you love the most. For the first believers, the decision to follow Jesus and the consequences of signing up to a life of faith in him were hugely complex. Following Jesus divided people from their families, because the decision to follow him required disciples to put their trust fully in Jesus and align themselves to him above and beyond anything and anyone else. Jesus took priority. [Explore and respond \(rootsontheweb.com\)](https://www.rootsontheweb.com)

Signs of the Times ...

There is a further stress on Jesus in this passage ... **why do you not get it – why do you not understand the significance of what is going on around you** – the signs of the times.

Back on Boxing Day in 2004 – a new word entered common usage – **Tsunami**. And we all learnt that if the sea

looked to be receding in the wrong direction – it might well return with massive height and force. We learnt to read the signs.

What are the signs of our times and how do we read them through the eyes of Jesus?

What a massive question for an August Sunday morning!!

As I prayerfully pondered this for today, one phrase kept coming into my mind – it's a phrase that's been used in many contexts:

Think Global, Act Local

Perhaps in this context, best adapted to:

Observe Global, Act local

What are the **'signs of the times' globally** – and what action can we take locally?

And observe the good, inspiring, hope-filled things as well as the destructive or troubling things: God can guide us through both.

So perhaps picking a less likely topic – consider the Commonwealth Games

In the Swimming Pool – complete integration of the events for non-disabled and disabled swimmers. Inspiring to many ... and such a relief and affirmation to some.

How can this town, this church, our schools learn or be strengthened in determination by this?

More controversially – what is the message of having different teams from Jersey, Guernsey, the Isle of Man, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England instead of a team GB?

... it gave many more people the opportunity to be involved, to use their talents ... but each team was weaker than a combined GB team would have been.

What does God want us to think and do because of this ... are there ways of keeping this kind of advantage, yet maximising effect?

That could apply in devolution or independence debates but also in how we tend to organise ourselves in families, businesses and church.

Jesus' words in today's Gospel invite commitment and discernment and action.

Amen.