

Sermon Notes – August 17, 2025
The Holy Gospel of St. Luke 12: 49-56
Peace Lutheran Church
“An Amazing Thing Happened in a Refining Fire”

The New Testament was written during the height of the Roman Empire, a period beginning with the reign of Caesar Augustus (who was emperor at Jesus' birth, Luke 2: 1) and continuing until 180 CE. Rome referred to this period as the *Pax Romana* - literally, “Roman Peace.” Caesar Augustus was praised for ushering in peace and was called a “son of God.” Luke's narrative of the birth of Jesus - the only “Son of God” - is in direct response to Augustus's peace, and especially in his retelling of the angels' proclamation in 2: 14, “...On earth peace among those whom [God] favors!”

While Caesar claimed to be a son of God, it is Jesus who is the true Son of God. While Caesar claimed to bring peace to the land, Jesus brings true peace. The impact of Jesus' message would have been especially felt by the Jewish Judeans and Galileans living on the underside of this Roman peace, along with others who were not citizens of the Roman Empire, all of whom lived as conquered peoples upon whom Rome's peace was built.

Roman art, such as the Arch of Titus (the now-famous 1st-century Roman monument commemorating the Romans' defeat of and the destruction of Jerusalem) , frequently depicts this tension – with their arts, government, and military being displayed alongside the plundered loot and enslaved peoples brought back to Rome and then paraded through the city in a procession of triumph. The *Gemma Augustea* (9-12 CE) illustrates this keenly, with images of the gods crowning Caesar Augustus with a laurel wreath, inaugurating the *Pax Romana* atop a parallel image of the gods conquering the peoples upon whose backs that peace was built and sustained.

In contrast, Luke proclaims that Jesus brings a different kind of peace - a peace for *all people*. But such peace is not easy; it does not come without struggle. This struggle is what Jesus highlights in the excerpt from Luke's gospel today. As Jeremiah points out, God's justice is not the stuff of easy dreams and visions. It requires confrontation with hard truths and real change. Sometimes, as in Isaiah, destruction must come before restoration.

Conflict is not the goal of Jesus' ministry, but those who follow Him must know that it is sometimes necessary to confront injustice in order to achieve peace. This is the refiner's fire (Luke 12: 49; Jer. 23: 29) that restores and makes new, unlike the fire of the enemy that destroys for selfish gain (Ps. 80: 16). Jesus speaks of conflict as a means toward God's judgment (Ps. 82: 8) and restoration (Ps. 80: 19) - the prize toward which the race is run (Heb. 12: 1-2).