

Have you ever noticed how many warning signs you pass by in the average day? Signs like “Do Not Enter,” “School Crossing,” “Caution: Wet Floor.” There’s a hilarious warning circulating on the Internet (author unknown).

**It goes like this: *WARNING: Do Not Shampoo Your Hair In The Shower!*** It’s so good to finally get a health warning that is useful. It involves the shampoo when it runs down your body while you shower with it. Shampoo Warning! I don’t know WHY I didn’t figure this out sooner! I use shampoo in the shower! When I wash my hair, the shampoo runs down my whole body, and printed very clearly on the shampoo label is this claim:

“FOR EXTRA BODY AND VOLUME.” No wonder I have been gaining weight! “For extra body and volume.” Well! I have gotten rid of that shampoo and I am going to start showering with Dawn dish soap instead. Its label reads like this: ***“DISSOLVES FAT THAT IS OTHERWISE DIFFICULT TO REMOVE.”***

**Problem solved! If I don’t answer the phone I’ll be in the shower.**

A trade school in Great Britain came up with an eye-catching warning sign to post in factories. On a piece of electrical equipment, they posted a truly scary sign: ***“Danger: Do Not Touch. Not only will this kill you, it will hurt the whole time you are dying.”*** That’s a warning sign you shouldn’t ignore.

**In our Bible passage for today Jesus has a warning for his followers.** The warning is this: if we choose him as our Savior and Lord, then we may very well face criticism and rejection, even in our most intimate relationship, our relationship with our family. **Listen closely to his words that many find disturbing:**

***“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”***

That sounds like some families I have known. Just kidding, but could Jesus, gentle Jesus, cause such DIVISION? This is a difficult passage. **We want Christ to give us peace in our homes and in our world; Christ is saying to us that his coming into the world could cause tension and division.**

In June 1924, a riot broke out at a baseball game between the New York Yankees and the Detroit Tigers. The Tigers were down by four runs in the ninth inning, so the Tigers’ pitcher expressed his frustration by intentionally beaming one of the New York batters. Soon the players of both teams were trading shoves and insults. Within minutes hundreds of fans spilled out onto the field and began fighting. It was one of the most notable examples of fan riots in American sports history.

Sports fans used to be the ultimate example of intense loyalty, of those who were “DIVIDED.” You can’t cheer for both the Packers and the Bears. **You must choose.** Either you love the Lakers and hate the Celtics, or you love the Celtics and hate the Lakers. **PICK A SIDE.**

**But sadly, those aren’t the biggest divisions in our country anymore.** Today we are divided over politics, values, lifestyles, culture, ethnicity. We want our churches to be the voice of unity and peace in our culture, and that is part of our calling. But there are numerous examples in the Bible of Jesus’ mission upsetting the status quo of religion and politics and culture and relationships. **It’s the reason Jesus was killed.** It’s the reason that his followers were persecuted, falsely accused, thrown into prison, tortured. It’s why some churches in other parts of the world have to meet in secret. This is why people say that you should never talk about politics, religion or money in polite company. Talking about your faith in certain quarters is guaranteed to create divisions. That’s painful. **How do we deal with that?**

**It’s important to remember that TRUE COMMITMENT ALWAYS CREATES TENSION.**

*Commitment to one thing requires rejection of ANOTHER.* Certain options are off the table. That’s why some people are **commitment-phobic**. They have a hard time committing their heart, their energy, their time, their money, their future to

a cause, to a relationship, to a belief. **Commitment is scary.** It requires discipline. It requires sacrifice. It requires giving up what feels good right now for what satisfies forever. **Some people never take that step.** YES, THEY HAVE A HARD TIME PICKING A SIDE.

**Wholehearted commitment is rare in our world, SO IT CAN SOMETIME CREATE TENSION.** People who make a difference in the world also are those who..." CHALLENGE OTHERS." – **they can cause TENSION AND DIVISION.**

Ron Luce's parents divorced when he was a child. When he was 15, he moved in with his father. His father was not the kind of father most of us would hope a Dad would be. His dad encouraged Ron to smoke pot and party. For a while Ron thought he'd found the perfect life. But then, a friend invited Ron to church. This little church was alive with joy, and the pastor's message connected with Ron, and he chose to become a follower of Jesus Christ. The joy he discovered changed his life. He stopped smoking pot and partying and began sharing his faith with all his friends. The result of that was that not long afterwards, his father and stepmother kicked him out of the house. They said they didn't want a Jesus freak living with them.

So, at sixteen years old, Ron was temporarily homeless and living out of his car. Ron's pastor took him in. As Ron would later write, "Being a part of my pastor's family was the most incredible experience of my Christian growth."

With the support of his new family, Ron Luce graduated from high school and college and went into the ministry. Today, he is the co-founder and president of Teen Mania Ministries where he devotes himself to spreading the message of God's hope and love to teenagers.

**At sixteen years old, Ron Luce's Family rejected him because of his commitment to Jesus, and it changed his life radically.** If he had refused to accept Jesus as his Savior . . . if he had been lukewarm in his faith . . . if he hadn't let the message of Jesus change his lifestyle . . . if he hadn't tried to share his faith with others, none of the blessings of his new life would have happened.

**YES, RON LUCE CHOSE TO "PICK A SIDE FOR JESUS."** Even though Jesus said, "*Do you think I came to bring peace on the earth?*" Jesus said. "*No, I tell you, but division.*" **Jesus warns us, wholehearted commitment always creates tension.** Yes, wholehearted commitment, no matter how hard it may be, calls us to pick a side.

**But wholehearted commitment MAY ALSO CREATE PASSION.** Jesus uses the imagery of fire to explain his mission on earth. "I have come to bring fire on the earth . . ." Usually we think of fire as a destructive force. But fire can also mean a couple of other things that are very positive. **Fire can symbolize PASSION.**

**Wholehearted commitment creates passion as well as division.**

Let me tell you about a young woman in central India named Kusum. Kusum was born into a Hindu family, but when she was 11 years old she secretly attended a Christian church service and converted to Christ. Since the election of Prime Minister Modi in India in 2014, persecution and violence against non-Hindu believers has increased in Kusum's town. Kusum and her husband had two sons. Soon after the birth of their second child, Kusum's husband died. The people in her village blamed her for his death, saying that her Christian faith had brought a curse on her family.

When employers discovered that Kusum was a Christian, she lost job after job. One employer told her that she could keep her job—her only means of providing for her children—if she gave up her faith in Jesus. She refused.

A few years later, Kusum's younger son died, and the villagers refused to let her bury him in the town. She had to carry his little body miles outside of the town and dig his grave by herself. A few hours after Kusum returned from burying her little boy, her father-in-law burst into her house with an ax. He blamed her Christian faith for the death of his son and grandson, and announced that he would kill Kusum for following Jesus. As Kusum cowered in fear, she prayed. She said, "I had only one certainty. I would not betray Jesus. Despite all the tragedies, he has never disappointed me." To her surprise, Kusum's father-in-law left without hurting her. In spite of the persecution and threats of violence and loneliness that she endures, Kusum remains faithful to Christ.

“I had only one certainty,” Kusum vowed, “I would not betray Jesus.” That’s passion. It’s the kind of passion Christ means to engender in all his followers. ***“I have come to bring fire on the earth . . .”***

**BUT FIRE HAS ANOTHER BENEFIT—IT BRINGS “NEW LIFE.”** Christ knew that the fire that was kindled in him would be kindled in his followers after his resurrection. He also knew that everyone who had this fire burning within them would find that this fire would burn away ***their old life, their old priorities, their old vanities. Fire destroys, but it also purifies.***

Rev. Meghan Feldmeyer knows the devastating effects of fire, particularly wildfires. Sometime back they swept through her hometown of Colorado Springs, CO. However, while researching wildfires, *she discovered that they also serve a useful purpose in creating new life.* She writes, “A forest that is affected by fire experiences ***something called plant adaptation.*** In this, plants and trees often adapt to be more resistant to fire . . . ***they become stronger and more resistant in the face of future danger. Also, there is increased growth in the forest after a fire . . . the heat from the fire triggers the dormant pinecone seeds to pop open and land in the charred and ashy soil, which is a mysteriously rich soil for new life to burst forth.***”

**FIRE RELEASES NEW LIFE.** Why do you think the CROSS--a symbol of suffering and death, represents the followers of Jesus Christ? Because death is essential for new life.

*And as you freely lay down your life for your FAITH in CHRIST... you witness to others the definition of ultimate commitment. WE ALL KNOW WHAT COMES NEXT...NEW LIFE, THANKS TO JESUS!!*

We want the church to be a beacon of peace in our society. We want our faith in Jesus to bring greater peace and unity and understanding to our families, our towns, our world. But committing to Jesus as Lord means giving up all other gods. It means putting God above everything, including our love for our family or our love for our own lives. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus bring peace to our hearts.

**YOUR WITNESS TO CHRIST MARKS THE GREATEST DIVIDING LINE IN HUMAN HISTORY.**

**It shows others that...**

- Either you are for him or against him.
- Either you are seeking a world of righteousness, justice and love or you are simply looking out for yourself.

**Remember, you can’t have it both ways.**

**IT IS TIME TO PICK A SIDE!! Amen.**