

Changing together (Luke 12:49-56; Jeremiah 23:23-29)

## **What questions arise if we take Jesus' warning literally?**

by [Hardy Kim](#)

August 16, 2019

*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.*

In [my Living by the Word column for this Sunday](#), I look at the way that many of us mainline Christians take it as a given that Jesus' notion of peace might disrupt the world's settled systems—sometimes without thinking about how our own practices might be “divided against” our stated beliefs.

But what questions arise if we take Jesus' warning in a more literal way? What if Jesus is simply predicting that his good news will throw society into an uproar, such that even members of a single household will be set against one another?

Fear, anger, and conflict in the face of drastic change might be unavoidable. But we can't simply resign ourselves to unresolved conflict in our most important relationships. Indeed, Jesus calls his listeners out at the end of the passage: “You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?” You know how to deal with all the intricacies of navigating the world's systems, but you can't be bothered to face the challenges I put before you?

I live in an area of great (and rapidly increasing) racial and religious diversity. There are many community pressures around education and housing and much grief over crises like environmental disasters, migration, and gun violence. Change is already in progress, and even more change seems inevitable. I imagine that many of you

find yourselves in similar positions.

So, the question I want to ask is this: How do we, in our communities, change together instead of being torn apart by conflict?

In conversations about all of these issues—at the church where I serve, or as part of local community organizing networks—progress feels very slow, and solutions seem far off. But one thing that keeps me coming back to the table is the fact that I get to connect with others, to build relationships that not only give me insight into their stories but also help me feel more and more like I am a part of the community.

Antonia Malchik [makes the case](#) that online activism is less effective at creating real change than face-to-face contact and in-person mass protests:

Community is both possible and necessary because of our evolutionary interdependence, but also because we share space: air, water, soil, roads, towns, cities, landscapes. In particular, our physical communities are made of spaces in which we interact, mingle, and strive to get along. Public spaces are where we greet our neighbors, watch out for kids on bikes, walk to work, give strangers directions, and bump into people because we're typing '<<hugs>>' in response to a friend's breakup news.

Malchik contends that a walkable community, where people can bump into each other and interact, is an essential component of building a society where needed change can happen. "Our brains have evolved to look for our tribes, our communities, and our neighbors to remind ourselves that we're not alone," she writes.

As we try to share the peace that God alone can give, we might do more to give that peace a fighting chance. We can get out and connect with others, and—at the risk of contradicting Jesus' message—resist the assumption that the conflict that comes with change cannot be overcome.