

**Now That's Just Awkward**  
**Luke 12: 49-56 MSG**  
**8/14/2016**

We all have awkward moments. Some are lucky enough to be captured on film:

- Picture 1** A loving father
- Picture 2** The poorly worded sweater
- Picture 3** Big hair from the 80's
- Picture 4** That special Christmas card photo

**That's Awkward!**

- Some are simply awkward moments like when the pastor, unexpectedly, asks you to pray.
- That awkward moment when you start to sing, one beat ahead of the rest of the congregation.
- That awkward moment when the only thing you know on the test is your name.
- That awkward moment when your boss sends you a friend request on Facebook.
- That awkward moment when everyone is serious and you start laughing.

Yeah, those are awkward, but Jesus had some awkward moments as well.

**I came to bring fire to the earth**

I can imagine a big awkward silence when Jesus says to his disciples, "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled" (v. 49).

**Awkward!**

**Do you think I have come to bring peace...**

Although he is known as the Prince of Peace, Jesus surprises his hearers by asking, "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I

tell you, but rather division ... father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother" (vv. 51, 53).

### **Awkward!**

#### **Jesus grabs our attention with words...**

But Jesus knows what he is doing. Jesus grabs our attention with his unexpected and uncomfortable words. He's giving us a message about the kingdom of God, a new order in which the social structures of the world are completely rearranged.

This is not an easy transformation, even for Jesus, who says, "What stress I am under until it is completed!" (v. 50). Yes, stress. Even Jesus feels stress.

So, how would you complete this sentence? "That awkward moment when Jesus asks you to ...."

Here's a story about an awkward situation, a Presbyterian pastor was in his office when a call came in from the local hospital. A man was dying in the ICU, and his nephew called and asked for the pastor to visit. Although the man had grown up Presbyterian, he was no longer affiliated with any church.

A visit to a total stranger on his deathbed. That's awkward! But the end of life is a precious time, and the pastor knew that Jesus would want him to be there. So he drove to the hospital, put on a gown and gloves, and went into the ICU. He met the nephew and was introduced to the dying man, who was awake but largely unresponsive.

The nephew asked the pastor to say a few words. So he assured the man that nothing in all creation -- nothing in life and not even death itself -- could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. He read the passage from Paul's letter to the Romans that contained that promise. And he encouraged the man to continue to put his trust in God and in his Son Jesus.

Then the nephew asked the pastor to tell his uncle about the thief on the cross, and about how it is never too late to turn to Jesus. The pastor told the story of the two thieves who were crucified next to Jesus. One mocked Jesus, while the other put his faith in him, and Jesus said to the second one, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (23:43). Then the pastor

told the dying man that it is never too late to turn to Jesus, receive his forgiveness, and enter into everlasting life with him.

The dying man never spoke. But fortunately no words are needed at a time like that. All that is needed is a heart that trusts in Jesus. The visit ended with the pastor holding hands with the man and his nephew, and offering a prayer for strength and peace and faith.

Was the visit awkward? You might think so. But if it helped a dying man put his trust in Christ and transition to the kingdom of God, then it was completely worth it.

### **Christians should embrace their awkwardness**

Perhaps Christians should embrace their awkwardness as well. It can work in our outreach to millennials, and to older adults as well. What, for you, is "That awkward moment when Jesus asks you to ..."?

#### **Speak the truth in love.**

Many people who are addicted to drugs or alcohol will not accept help unless they are confronted with the facts of their chemical dependency. You may be called upon to be part of an intervention, in which you speak the truth in love. An intervention is "not a punishment," writes Vernon Johnson. "It is not an opportunity for others to clobber [the dependent person] verbally. It is an attack upon the victim's wall of defenses, not upon the victim as a person."

An intervention is a confrontation, and it can be awkward. But it can also be life-saving, as it helps people to face the reality of their disease and begin to get help. Interventions can help people to reconnect with the real world -- God's world.

#### **Paying attention to signs of the kingdom**

How about that awkward moment when Jesus asks you to pay attention to signs of the kingdom? In today's text, Jesus criticizes the crowds who are able to predict the coming of rain or the arrival of a scorching heat wave, but cannot see the coming of the kingdom of God (vv. 54-56).

We might criticize the crowd around Jesus, but do we perform any better? Perhaps we are focusing on the wrong things -- we're able to spot the

arrival of the latest iPhone, but we cannot see signs of trouble in our marriages, our families, our churches and our communities. New Testament scholar R. Alan Culpepper asks, "Have we given as much attention to the health of the church as we have to our golf score? Have we given as much attention to the maintenance of our spiritual disciplines as to the maintenance schedule for our car?"

Paying attention to the health of the church and our spirituality can be awkward. It's much easier to focus on our golf scores or car maintenance. But Jesus challenges us to look for signs of the kingdom of God, and to shape our lives in accordance with kingdom values, even when such values cause conflict with people around us.

### **And by being willing to endure family dissension**

How about that awkward moment when Jesus asks you to write your will? This is where the truth of the words of Jesus became painfully clear: "From now on five in one household will be divided, 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" (vv. 52-53).

Exactly when does this happen? When you write your will and decide to give 10 percent of your estate to the church.

Conflict arises when sons and daughters, as well as sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, don't get what they think they deserve. But what could be more supportive of the values of God's kingdom than a significant gift to a church or a charity? Church members spend their lives giving a portion of their income to God's work in the church, and it makes perfect sense, at the end of life, to give a similar portion of their estate to God's work.

Such a gift is not awkward, despite what disappointed family members might say. Instead, it is entirely consistent with a life of faithful stewardship.

When Jesus asks you to visit a person who is dying, speak the truth in love, pay attention to signs of the kingdom and write your will, it could be awkward. We find these situations uncomfortable and unsettling. But although they make us squirm, such actions shake up the social order and prepare us for life in the kingdom of God.

Yes, they are painful now. But in the end, the stress of this life will be replaced by the peace of eternal life with God.

There will be nothing awkward about it.

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In today's scripture reading, instead of making us feel good, Jesus grabs our attention with his unexpected and uncomfortable words.

### **Luke 12:49-56**

#### **Message Bible paraphrase:**

"I've come to start a fire on this earth—how I wish it were blazing right now! I've come to change everything, turn everything right side up—how I long for it to be finished! Do you think I came to smooth things over and make everything nice? Not so. I've come to disrupt and confront! From now on, when you find five in a house, it will be—

Three against two,  
and two against three;  
Father against son,  
and son against father;  
Mother against daughter,  
and daughter against mother;  
Mother-in-law against bride,  
and bride against mother-in-law."

Then he turned to the crowd: "When you see clouds coming in from the west, you say, 'Storm's coming'—and you're right. And when the wind comes out of the south, you say, 'This'll be a hot one'—and you're right. Frauds! You know how to tell a change in the weather, so don't tell me you can't tell a

change in the season, the God-season we're in right now. How is it that you don't know how to interpret the present time?