

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost  
August 18, 2019  
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Church of the Holy Cross

Fire!

Fire! It is necessary for humans to thrive, and at the same time more frightening than almost any element. Fire is to be respected—not to respect it means you may find yourself burned.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells us He has come to bring fire, and He adds that he only wishes that the fire was already kindled! Jesus wishes that the message He has come to deliver to us had already been figured out by someone. He hoped that there would have forward movement behind the idea that we are all brothers and sisters, and we need to love and respect each other so that we might all thrive. In the Jewish community, it was important that there were strong relationships built between families and neighbors. They knew that if everyone in the community thrived, everyone would benefit. But somewhere on the way to a world filled with love and compassion, we humans got a taste of success. That taste becomes an insatiable desire, and that kind of desire corrupts a person, and opens the door to greed, gluttony, envy, sloth, lust, anger, last but not least—pride! “Look what I have, look at what we have done, by watching out for number one!” Many of you who have been participating in Megan’s summer series on the Seven Deadly Sins, are keenly aware of how small acts of selfishness can grow into a tangled mess of thorns and underbrush.

Fire! Jesus came to bring fire. One thing we know about fire, is that controlled burns are used to prevent forest fires, and to promote new growth. Naturally occurring wildfires happen every few years, and we have learned to back burn in order to benefit the forest. Fires burn plant debris, dead trees, wipes out diseases, and makes way for new growth, promoting healthy trees and vegetation. When the forest thrives, so does the wildlife. The clearing away of the past, allows room for everything to renew. As with most things, ending well is essential to have healthy new beginnings. Holy Cross is in the process of ending well the tenure of our Rector Denise. The good news is that there is a new beginning ahead of us, and working together we will experience new growth, and new life, and I have faith that we will continue to thrive.

St. Paul tells us in his Epistle today, “...let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...” and in order to run with perseverance we must first, “lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely.” We need to honor the past, learn from it, and then put it behind us. We need to pick up our heads and focus forward on the possibilities for new growth and a healthy future for the long-term. We need to set ourselves on Kingdom goals.

The fire that I think Jesus was bringing in the Gospel, was the notion that it was time to clear away the past. To free us from the tangled mess of thorns and underbrush that grew by bending God’s commandments to meet our earthly desires. Jesus hoped that some people would have seen the signs of the times, and realized how far from loving and supporting each other we had strayed. He found instead, a world that focused on building castles for ourselves, and not God’s Kingdom.

What are the signs around us today that we are failing to see? What would it take to clear a path for us to move forward, growing in new and healthy ways. Truth, sometimes, it really is very hard to see the forest for the trees. I am not sure about you, but I need to take a step back. Breathe in hope, and breathe out anxiety. I am responsible for my actions. I alone decide what I will focus on in this next year, and this next minute, but I am not alone, we have each other. Together we can clear away what does not serve us or move us forward.

Sounds simple right? Ah, then there is the part of the Gospel where Jesus says, *“Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! 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 her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”* Did you notice how these divisions were generational, and what does this mean? Before I address this little tangled mess of scripture, I just have to ask if you all have noticed how often I end up with these kinds of passages? Last week was “Fear not little flock!” I get the Gospel version of family feud. We challenge the people we love. We expect more of family, and we hold them to standards that are higher than those we hold friends or strangers. Is there anyone here who has not experienced a family argument, or been at odds with a parent, child, or in-law? Families divide when some hang onto tradition, while others embrace a new way to feed their spirit. The protests and division we experienced during Vietnam, are a good example of the establishment being protested by a mostly younger generation. Today is no different than 2000 years ago, 160 years ago, 60 years ago, or yesterday—change brings discord, but change is inevitable.

Jesus knew that when His message to focus on Kingdom goals and put aside our earthly needs, would cause some major disagreements. The division in Jesus’ time was between the devout Jewish people and the new “Christians” who recognized Jesus for who he was, a man speaking the truth. Bringing fire was not proscriptive, it was descriptive. People in power do not relinquish it voluntarily. The more threatened they feel the more vicious they get. Jesus is asking of us the same thing he was asking those in His time. To look around us, stand with and for each other. To be generous with our time, talent and money, and use our gifts to spread love and respect for people and all of creation. Generosity will however, find itself in opposition to our desire to build personal wealth. It is not enough to give to others only after we feel we have enough for ourselves. Imagine telling your spouse that you spent the family food budget on the people next door. Tell your child that the new bike they wanted was given to the child down the street, because they had no bike at all. And the money your mother-in-law gave you to educate your children was used to put a roof on a shelter instead. Now that would be one fun conversation at the Thanksgiving table! Those who work to achieve wealth, comfort, and status in the here and now, will be at odds with those that feel they have all they need, and that excess should be shared in love with others. Far too often we hear people complaining, “What about me? My food, my clothes, my quartz countertops? What about the game console and designer shoes my kids need to fit in? Can we not read the signs of our own times? We are killing each other over *Pumped Up Kicks*, yet we are oblivious to the scars it leaves on our souls.

Focusing on Kingdom goals and not earthly desires is our greatest challenge. Our difficulty in sharing is hard wired into our sense of self-preservation. On top of that, the seven deadly sins lie to us about what is best, and what God would want for us. They tempt us to give in until our wants and desires and it overwhelms us. God is with us, we just need to have faith. We need to support each other, because not to do so, will hold all of us back, remember, fire is coming. The world is complicated, and it is easy to get overwhelmed by the harshness of the world. When

that happens, take solace in the words of author L. R. Knost, *“Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.”* We are the light, and the fire is not coming to consume us, but to clear space for new growth. We need only to stand near the waters of our Baptism, and keep our vows to resist evil, and respect the dignity of all people, then we will do more than survive – we will thrive. AMEN

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wildfire>

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/natural-disasters/wildfires/>

[https://www.amazon.com/L.-R.-Knost/e/B009TW591U%3Fref=dbs\\_a\\_mng\\_rwt\\_scns\\_share](https://www.amazon.com/L.-R.-Knost/e/B009TW591U%3Fref=dbs_a_mng_rwt_scns_share)

Isaiah 5:1-7-- Psalm 80:1-2, 8-18-- Hebrews 11:29-12:2-- Luke 12:49-56