

Sermon for August 14, 2022—The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 12:49-56

49“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! 50I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! 51Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! 52From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; 53they 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.”

54He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain’; and so it happens. 55And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. 56You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

SERMON

When Jesus talks about kindling fire, his disciples might have recalled the refining fires the prophet Malachi describes. They’ve been around long enough to know that Shalom and the status quo are at odds. Jesus invests his life; risks his life opposing a world of “might makes right” and “survival of the fittest”— forces that oppress everyone else.

Last week we heard Jesus compare himself to a thief when he speaks of bringing the realm of God. Good News yes...but at a cost. The preacher Alyce McKenzie itemizes the tab saying Jesus takes away our false

priorities and swipes our schemes that keep others down. These things don't go away without a fight.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus wishes for the kindling fires that burn away these same life diminishing ways. He is en route to Jerusalem to confront earthly and unseen powers that threaten creation and humanity.

Thinking about how actual refining fires work might help us imagine what Jesus is about when he speaks more metaphorically about fire.

One of our members' life experience provides us more contemporary and local take on the refiner's fire. Thanks Morley for sharing your insights working the furnaces at Atlas Steel in Welland. As he tells it

3 huge electrodes are lowered into a furnace not touching steel. When the electrodes are switched on they touch each other and the scrap steel producing a heat of up to 3200 degrees C and melting the steel.

The furnace is like a big clay or brick pot that is tipped to pour the molten steel through a narrow spout into a mold.

Scrap metal is transformed into many kinds of steel. Stainless for cutlery, dishwashers, Carbon Steel for strength etc. Intense energy removes the impurities and transforms one thing into another.

Consider sunlight—We think it's constant or static. In reality, warming rays finally arrive to us by way of continuous atomic fusion more powerful than millions of nuclear reactors. Matter is spent creating energy; heat and light. Through out the universe the circle goes from matter expending itself to become energy and energy expending itself as it transforms into matter.

The ancients had a similar sense of life—images of the Phoenix bird arising from ashes provide perspective and hope of transformation and new life.

Death and resurrection lie at the heart of our faith. Church as we know it is dying. We so hope to reverse course, keeping the status quo, we imagine what a resurrection might look like.

Years ago I saw a cartoon where a preacher exhorts the flock asking, “Who wants change?” All hands go up and in unison they cry, “We do!” Then the pastor calls out, “who wants TO change?”. The congregation sits stock still and no one speaks.

Your preacher asks, who wants to be changed? Might the church have something in common with the lodgepole pine? The cones are covered in resin and require the intense heat of wildfire to break open. The seeds even germinate better with such heat.

Might crises like the pandemic, economic uncertainty, and political instability function like heat? Not that God has engineered such chaos, yet might God use the church to bear witness to hope when things look bleak? Might church embody and live out the hope that God intends to heal all of creation?