

Fire, Smoke, and Mirrors—Part 2
June 9, 201
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So it's now been twenty-one days since Pentecost.

Wow. The days went fast...

Seemed like May just stuck its head in the room, waved, and walked away, didn't it?

Things, moments, people, places... all of these sights in front of our eyes...

...they pass so quickly, don't they?

...What lasts?

Our scripture readings, today, from the gospel of Luke,

and the sermon series we've been doing on this *holy fire* in our hearts...

...they leave us with this question, while we consider down deep,

the *substance* of our faith---

---What it is that brought us to God, and *keeps* us with God, as we go.

Now, just as a quick recap,

Since Pentecost, we've been talking about this fire we get goin' in our souls...

... this burning passion we feel for God, in our lives...

The first week---on the *day* of Pentecost---

--we thought about the *spreading* of God's holy fire through the world,

as *we* pick up where the disciples left off, touching the lives around us
 with the warmth God's created in our hearts,
 spreading God's love with our own, the best we can.

...The week after that, we meditated over the fact that this fire in our souls---
 ---it needs *tending* if we want it to keep going....

And we thought about some of the ways we each do this on our own...

...nurturing that flame inside by staying in touch with God---with the Life around us---
 each day we wake up and go to sleep.

And later---last week---we talked about the different ways

we get that fire in our hearts started, to begin with...

---About some of the ways Christians new in their relationship with God,

sometimes feel that fire go out too soon, leaving them in the cold and dark,

because, like with those seeds Jesus was talking about in Luke, their faith was built on
 stuff that just won't hold up.

Stuff that just won't keep a burn.

...Kindling that's maybe too flimsy, too fresh, too temporary...

...or even too *big*, to catch that heat and spread into something warm...

...something that will *last*.

At the end of our service, last week, we ended the first half of this sermon, and

left the sanctuary with that question to keep in our hearts between then and today...

... What is the *substance* of our faith?

What's at the core of the stuff that burns inside of us,
that keeps the passion of our love for God alive, in a *continual* burn?

This morning, in the last part of our Pentecost sermon series,
we're going to talk about what it takes

To get that holy fire roaring in our hearts, and keep it burning bright through the hours,
so that not only *we* can feel the heat of the love of God in our own lives,
But so that we might also light the way for *others* to grab sight of,
and feel the warmth of God's spirit in their own souls too.

So what is it?

What is the *substance* of faith that gets that *good* fire burning in our hearts?

Picking right back up where we left off,

Just like any practiced outdoorsman (or woman)

realizes that the flimsy kindling will just dwindle away,

They also understand that in order to get a *good* fire going... one that lasts...

You have to *know*, what it is you're working with.

The kindling---those tiny pieces we pile up at the base of it all---sure.

But more importantly, we need to know that *flame*---be intimate with the fire, *itself*.

... You've got to be well acquainted with its ways---how it moves, how it acts.

The ways it touches things, and travels through things. Understand that it *breathes*.

These little pieces we pick up here and there, and gather from the world around us...

... they're so important for what we use to base our fire...

...but those things... they're never the same.

They're always different, depending on where you are at the time,

because the conditions of the environment---

---the places we find ourselves---they're always changing.

But what is constant---what is *crucial*---to building that long lasting, roaring fire,

is what we know about that *flame*.

...And when you know the flame, you know all of the right pieces

to gather from the life around you,

without a second thought, that will hold that heat just right...

...not because we know so well some kind of easy,

constant list of stuff we should gather to make that fire burn bright...

...But because we know the *flame*, itself.

Being the purest energy of Life---the light that leads us and warms us, and sustains us---

God *is* the fire of our souls.

And the substance of our faith---the heart of maintaining that holy fire inside---

---is our knowledge of God. Our knowing God.

Just like with any other fire, to set our souls to burn---

--to light a sustainable faith, inside-- we have to be intimate with God's ways.

To remember all of the ways we've seen God move.

The ways we've seen God act.

The ways we've watched God touch into the world around us,
and breathe into the life of all things.

...And just as we gather that kindling for our campfires,

being familiar with the ways a flame lives and moves,

---We do the same with the holy fire of our faith.

Knowing God...knowing the ways God moves...

...knowing the ways the presence of God works through the life within us...

we gather up all of these tiny pieces of our lives

---those always changing moments, places, experiences, memories---

And we pile them up together to catch our souls ablaze,

and hold that fire of the love of God, in our hearts through the hours,

...as something that will *last*.

...And through the dark and into the new day, we tend what we have,

being warmed and fed by that heat and that light, all the while.

To have faith---to have that long burning substance of faith in your soul---

--you have to *know* God.

When I first started lighting fires. I wasn't too good at it.

Found myself coughing on campfire smoke—at *best*, a lot of times.

I'd pile all the wrong stuff up, the wrong way, in the wrong order,
at the base of that fire, not knowing how that flame lived and moved....

...And it would all just fizzle.

Didn't know what I was doing because I didn't know the flame.

But how do you get to know the flame if you can't get it going to begin with?

How does true faith turn into knowing God? How does it start, then?

I've a lot of times wondered who the first person was, to start a fire.

How it happened, when his or her cave-person mind finally figured it out.

How did they get to know that flame?

And all I could imagine, was that this hairy bi-ped—whoever it was---

Must've just seen the fire move through the world in some way, on its own, at first.

A bolt of lightning maybe struck some dry wood, and the entire thing caught ablaze.

Maybe they at first ran away, scared,

not wanting to be hurt by this thing they didn't understand.

Then later, when it happened again, they became more curious,

and let their eyes stay with it for awhile...

...Staring in awe at the sight of it, not knowing what it was, but curious to find out.

Maybe this cave-person walked up to it, to feel it, and realized it was hot---

---That it baked their hair near the touch.

Maybe then, they stood back a little, and watched how it moved,
the ways it touched and traveled through the pieces of the world around them---
---sort of studying it---as they stared.

Then, I'd imagine, at some point, he or she
must've realized it was something they wanted with them, all of the time,
because their skin and whole body felt better, close to its warmth.

And, after seeing and knowing its ways, maybe they made a decision.

They grabbed something they knew the flame would hold on to,
And reached that piece out to that heat, and let it catch,
then brought that smaller piece of the fire back with them, to where they liked to sleep
and eat.

Others likely soon saw them with it, and wondered about it.

They'd gather close and feel its heat, and soon wanted it close to them,
in their own places for sleeping and eating, too.

After watching what the other one was doing,
and watching that flame and how it caught to things---after getting to know it,
themselves---

maybe they grabbed something around them they knew would catch too,

Touched it to that fire, and carried that flame away with them,
to warm and light their lives, the same way.

And I think this is the way we are with God.

I think this is the way---you and I, and all of the others---get to know God as we live.

I believe this is the heart of the way that holy fire comes to thrive in us,
and spread through the world to warm our human lives---
---just the same.

We come to know God, first by seeing God act in the world.

Wondering about it, we watch it, study it, move closer...

... and soon, we find that that burning heat of the love of God
is something we want for ourselves, too...

... and we take it with us. From that point on, keeping it close, wherever we go.

...Building it up and letting it roar.

Others see that light, and feel that heat, and they look at it in wonder,
and take a piece of it for themselves,

Letting their soul be warmed by God by day, and by night, for the rest of their lives.

We see this very thing happen with the Centurion,

in our scripture reading from Luke, today.

From the gospel of Luke, Chapter 7 verses 1-3:

After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. 2 A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. 3 When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave.

The Centurion---at first completely unfamiliar with God,
and God's ways, being a Roman soldier---

had seen God moving through the world, as Jesus spoke, and healed,
and helped all of those suffering, around him.

I'm sure at first he recoiled. At first, he probably wanted nothing to do with it...

... but watching this happen, again and again... he became curious.

...And seeing the ways God moved and touched...

...studying God's Life work through others, from afar,

---After coming to *know* God through these things---

he realized he wanted this warmth, for himself.

He needed this warmth, this light, in his own life.

He reaches out to God, and Jesus comes near, to see him; and the Centurion says, in verse 7:

But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. 8 For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it."

Now, it's important to focus on what the Centurion says, here.

Each word he speaks shows his surety, his certainty, his *knowledge* of God,
and the ways God works, and moves, and breathes, and acts in the world.

His knowledge of God, and God's power, and the ways God moves,

is, in fact, so sure, at this point,

he *knows* exactly where Jesus does and does not need to be---exactly what Jesus is capable of doing---

to touch the life of his slave, and heal whatever sickness was threatening to end him.

And he knows this, because he's familiar with
 the way that flame of God's love moves and lives through each piece of creation.
 He knows the ways the heat of that love will catch and burn into his life,
 and into the life of the world.

From Luke, verse 9:

9 When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." 10 When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

The substance of our faith is our knowledge of God. Our *knowing* God.

Our intimacy with God's ways.

---Our understanding of how God moves, through the sight of our own eyes,
 and through our experience of Life deep down in our souls.

And it's this knowledge, that sets our souls to burn with passion in the holy fire of God's love,

---It's this *knowing*, that builds the fire in our soul into something that will last,

And spread that light and heat to others,

as they watch God's Spirit warm our own lives, over and over again---

And realize they want that roaring heat with them, through each hour, too.

So as we close up this Pentecost sermon series,

Let's think about that fire inside of us, and the ways, we first gathered it,

And like the Centurion, came to know God at first, from a distance, then very very closely.

Let's ask ourselves about the ways we let that light shine in us,
and make it available for others to see,
So they can feel----just as we did, just as that soldier did---
---a desire in their own soul to get to know God,
And set that fire to burn again, for another.

In doing this, we're picking right back up where the disciples left off
on that day of Pentecost, so long ago.

In doing this, we're letting those skeptics I talked about last week
understand it's not all just smoke and mirrors,

As we spread the reality of the love of God through the world from one heart,
to the next, and to the next,

With the raging heat of a holy fire, into something that will last.

Amen.