

Rev Ken Wratten
 August 18, 2019 – 10 Pentecost
 St. Luke's

Jeremiah 23:23-29 God says that His word is like fire.
 Heb 11:29 – 2:2 Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.
 Luke 12:49-56 I came to bring fire to the earth.

Jesus said, “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed!”

Jesus realized that in a few weeks He would be immersed (his word was ‘baptized’) in the agonizing pain of his Passion. Because he knew his time on earth was coming to its end, he felt an urgency to kindle the fire he had brought to earth. The fire He brought isn’t physical fire; it is the burning, exciting, dynamic presence of God in the lives of people: this is more than belief in God, but a passion for God. And Jesus can’t wait to see that fire raging in us; not like a faint candle flame, but like a summer campfire.

[Describe summer campfires at Westcott’s Beach, using dried tree bark from Berry’s Lumber; truck loads; sparks in the air.]

When John the Baptist was asked if he was the Messiah he replied, “... one more powerful than I will come... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit **and with fire.**” (Luke 3:16) Jesus came to immerse us (baptize us) with more than a belief in God; but with a passion for God. Having this ‘fire’ changes everything!

1. The fire Jesus brings generates unlimited power. A passion for God in our heart produces the energy we need to live the Christian life. It is a life feeling the flow of God’s Grace, and steering our life to stay in that flow of grace. Has that fire been kindled in your heart? If so, are you keeping it blazing? Any fire needs to be tended. (My experience heating our home with a wood stove one winter in NNY). You have to tend your spiritual fire, too.

2. When you tend the fire of passion for God in you, you can handle the distractions in life that can keep you away from God. Have you ever felt STALLED in your spiritual growth? Have you allowed life to push so many distractions into your day that there is no room for God anymore? Then it is time for a priority shift. (Describe my cycle of adding and shedding commitments.). If you are spiritually stalled, change your priorities to keep God in your day.

3. The fire of passion for God radiates through us, and it grabs the attention of other people who see the ‘flames’. Once God’s fire is lit in your heart, it’s pretty

hard to keep it a secret. Think of people you know who radiate their faith when you see them. You can see it in their face, you can hear it in the words they use, you can feel it through the mood they are in. Ask yourself: How does your faith look to other people?

4. Jesus came to earth to bring a passion for God, but he also wants us to know that this decision can cause divisions. In my life, I have seen the development of my faith change my friendships; even the songs I know. (Describe my playing guitar as a kid, a tune my father wanted to hear, but the lyrics I knew were Christian lyrics. My father was disappointed.)

A last point about the passion for God in our lives comes from the author of Hebrews; “Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us”. Our Christian faith journey, our life of Grace, depends on having perseverance - a commitment that God’s fire will be tended by us. In this faith family, we dedicate ourselves to learn and grow together. But in the final analysis, keeping our spiritual fires at their popping and crackling high is mostly personal work: **it is up to each of us** to stay in fellowship, keep learning, come together in worship, serve with the heart of Christ, and share our faith with others.

There is thrilling power in aligning our life with the will of God. It is exciting, and fulfilling. It brings purpose and peace, a release from anxiety, and a clear picture of what is important. Living the life of grace is life with a **passion** for God, and learning **perseverance** to get through the distractions of life.

Years ago I was taught that each of us should find our ‘life verse’. It is a verse of Scripture that especially speaks to us; that we have memorized; that we use lots of times in our faith journey. The life verse that has stuck with me is Philippians 4:13. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

It is a verse I commend to you today; as it speaks of a faith filled with passion and perseverance.

Amen.