

AN ENCOURAGING WORD FOR TROUBLING TIMES #120 (by Rev. Dr. Alice Wolfe, 9/9/20)

“Putting Out Wildfires”

My heart aches when I see the video of the horrific wildfires raging out West. So much destruction and devastation! So much heartache and human loss! USA Today reports that as of this past Tuesday, eight lives have been lost, more than 3,300 structures have been destroyed, and that more than 7,500 wildfires have burned 2.2 million acres in California (alone) in recent weeks.

What caused all these fires? The National Park Service website states that nearly 85 percent of wildland fires in the U.S. are caused by humans—pyrotechnic devices, unattended smoldering campfires, equipment use or malfunction, negligently discarded cigarettes, and arson. More than likely, then, humans caused at least most of this terrible destruction.

As horrible as these wildfires are, we have other wildfires raging and sweeping through our nation—wildfires set by sharp, angry, bitter, hostile, vengeful words about political leaders, the pandemic, racism, and everything else imaginable. Our words can cause untold destruction and devastation, heartache and human loss. James, the brothers of Jesus, explains in James 3:1-11 (NLT):

2 Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. 3 We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. 4 And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. 5 In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire.

6 And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself. 7 People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, 8 but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. 9 Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. 10 And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! 11 Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water?

Smoky the Bear reminds us, “Only YOU can prevent forest fires.” God reminds us, only HE can help us prevent wildfires of wicked words. Certainly, God does not hold us accountable for the wicked words that come from others’ mouths, but he does hold us accountable for every careless, hurtful word that comes from our mouths (Mat. 12:36). God will help us, if we ask and seek him...

We have three choices in the battle of wildfires of wicked words: (1) We can start or add to the fire with our own angry, bitter, hateful, unforgiving words, (2) we can ignore the wildfire and let it continue ravaging a path of destruction (not caring about the devastation or death it causes), or (3) we can share loving, forgiving, peaceful words from the Living Water, Jesus Christ, to prevent new and douse existing fires. Which one do you choose?

PRAYER:

God of love, we pray for all affected by the wildfires out West...; give them your comfort, peace, hope, and courage. We pray for safety for all, especially the firefighters risking their lives for others. Please, send cool rain to help douse the fires, and guide people to not start new fires. Help us to not start wildfires of wicked words. Forgive us for any we have started... Fill us with Jesus, the Living Water, to douse any anger, hatred, bitterness, or unforgiveness in us..., and to enable your Living Water to overflow out of us in words of love, peace, and forgiveness. Pour out your Living Water on our nation to douse the wildfires of wickedness. Help us to be instruments of your love and peace... Amen.

LIVE IT!

Reflect on James 3:1-11. What is God saying to you? Pray and live the prayer above.