

Sermon, August 14, 2022
Jeremiah 23:23-29 & Luke 12:49-56
“Deeper: Fire”
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My goodness what a busy few days we have had. A block party yesterday, worship this morning, and Messy Church this afternoon. It's so wonderful to be a part of a church that loves Jesus. Loves one another and loves its community. I know someone who comments they love to look at our bulletin because our church is so active.

But one of the blessings is that we are not just active, but in ministry. Even in the midst of all of the other activities, we met for Second Saturday to do ministry for our community. One of those significant ministries is our wood ministry, of course. Sunshine, rain, cold weather, they are out there cutting and stacking wood to give out for free to anyone who might need it to keep their homes warm. When you don't have much money and you are doing everything to take care of yourself, that wood might make all the difference in the world. None of us want to go without heat. That fire from that wood can make all the difference for some people, so thank you for those who go out there every month.

Staying warm is essential, isn't it? I know we don't think much about it when we are in the midst of summer. We are mostly thankful for air conditioning. Fans and open windows. Shade. But we know that

won't last forever. Why, before we know it, Fall will be back with us. And then winter. It will get colder, and we will need heat. And many of us will turn to our fireplaces or wood burning stoves to provide that extra warmth, maybe some extra coziness a fire can bring.

When I was a kid, I thought my parents were obsessed with our fireplace and burning a fire in it.

Of course, it wasn't until I got older I realized they did that to keep energy cost down. We were in the middle of an energy crisis, and all energy costs were skyrocketing. The fireplace kept the energy prices down.

So fire provided warmth, increased resources made it cozy and enjoyable. But it was also dangerous. You can't leave fire unattended without some safety measures because fire is also dangerous. And if you aren't careful, it can get out of control.

I knew a family that used their fireplace a lot, they didn't have a screen in the fireplace. Every now and then, the wood would pop and send sparks out. Often onto their carpet. Someone would immediately jump up and put it out. Now, to preserve the carpet, they found an old rug and put that in front of the fireplace. That did help preserve their carpet, but it did nothing to stop the danger. The wood still shifted and popped and sent sparks out onto the carpet. Every now and then an ember would slip out. And somebody had to get that ember off of that carpet. Because if they didn't, everything would catch fire. And, of course that would change everything. Growing up, we had three neighbors who had four house fires between them. Four. Thankfully two of those just caused some minor smoke and fire damage. But the others were pretty bad. Thankfully, no one lost their lives, and I think only one person suffered a minor burn. But in every case, there was a similar pattern. Once the fire got out, it wanted to burn and set everything around it on fire.

Fire is warm, its cozy, it invites light. But it also strains not to be contained. Where is the fire in your spiritual life? Is it a fire that just makes us cozy? Many of us have that type of faith. It's a warm and fuzzy faith that makes us feel good. It's a faith we feed every Sunday that has a familiarity, it's comforting, the music is comforting, we want comforting messages, our devotions make us feel good. And we can just wrap Jesus around us like a warm fuzzy blanket while we sit on our front porch.

Some of us have faith that provides light. It lets us see where we are going, it helps us figure out our lives, gives us a path in how we are to live. Helps me see that I shouldn't get too anxious, I shouldn't get too worried about things, helps get a grip on the world around me. It's like a window through which I view the world, and through which I get to decide my values.

For some of us, it's a faith fire that provides warmth. It's what gets us through the day. Life can be trying. And I think that's a better word; we talk about life being hard, and that's not always true. But I do think that life can almost always be very trying. We know Thomas Paine's famous line "These are the times that try

men's souls". But we always have those times. And we need a faith that's going to warm us up, get us through the trying times. I just need a faith fire that going to warm me up and help me get through the day. A scripture, a nice saying somewhere and that's all I need.

But that's not all fire is supposed to do. We have been looking over the past month and a half at going deeper and specifically how our actions and prayer life will cause us to go deeper in faith. It's a call to not settle for a shallow faith or relationship with God but to go deeper. But going deeper comes with consequences, as we see in both of our Scriptures. If you go deeper, really seek God, He is going to catch your faith on fire. And we say great. I love that. I want illumination, I want comfort, I want the warm and cozy Jesus.

But that's not all God has for us in the fire. In both of these Scriptures, we are warned the fire of God, when it is placed within our lives, will do what fire always wants to do. It wants to get out and change everything. In both of these scriptures, God says to us *stop trying to contain your faith*. Let it get out. Let it burn, let it change everything. Because that's how fire spreads.

I think we do a fantastic job of containing our faith. We stoke it with worship and the Bible and prayer, we let it help us see things, it makes us content and warm. But we don't want to let it out. We want control. We don't want it to spread everywhere because real change might happen. Where it might make a difference in our lives and in our world might cause us to make difficult decisions that affect the world around us. So we contain it. We keep it for us, but we don't let it out. But what happens to a fire when you contain it? It eventually cools and goes out. If we want our fire to grow our faith, to grow deep, we have to let it out and begin to truly burn.

Look at what God says through Jeremiah to the false prophets. Do you know how to tell a false prophet in the Old Testament? You could tell by two things. One, what they say about the future didn't come true. And two, they only said what everyone liked to hear. If you only said what they liked to hear, what comforted, they were false prophets because the prophet of God said things the king didn't want to hear, saying things others didn't want to hear, but the word of God, the truth, became a change agent in the world around them. They spoke out against injustice, spoke for those who couldn't speak, spoke out against sin especially when everyone else was calling what was bad good. This type of fire gets you in trouble gets you in prison, gets you criticized by others, It's also the fire that changes and blesses others.

This is what Jesus says in our Gospel. Jesus' point is this; look, you cannot follow Me, I mean really follow Me, and think things in your life won't change. I'm going to change everything. And some of these changes will be wonderful, and some of them might be painful. Jesus says *I didn't come to bring peace*, meaning I didn't come so that you would get along with everyone and not stand up for what is right, *I came*

so that the world might be saved and my followers would continue to spread the fire of Christ into their world. To bring justice, to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, to call that which is evil, evil and good. Good, even if the world doesn't understand..

As Christians, we live in a time when the church has tried to contain its fire and not want it to get out. And when we do, like the church in Laodicea in Revelation, we begin to cool off and our light grows dim. May all of us go deeper. May all of us let the fire of our faith loose, get out, touch others. Bring His Kingdom to this world. For it is then, and only then, that His light will spread. Amen.