

All Saints Steenrijk Episcopal Church

Willemstad, Curacao

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 15 (C)

August 14, 2022

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“Fire, Future, and Faith”

The Holy Gospel: Luke 12:49-56

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! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell

you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they 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." He 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. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the

appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

Dear God, forgive us for trying to put out your fire in our lives. May we burn brighter because of you. Amen.

Fire, future, and faith: the three F's I want to speak about today: Fire, future, and faith.

First fire. Jesus said he came to bring fire to the earth. What is he saying? Fire can do many things: destroy, purify, and catalyze.

We live in a time when people's opinions can be spread rather easily by "social media", Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, Spotify, Reddit, email, Whatsapp, you name it—and many different viewpoints come into our minds from many different people. Some viewpoints fire us up, agitate us, some make us want to run the other way, but a few motivate us to be better persons. Sometimes a long-held belief is not exactly correct or even correct at all. Then we need to test the new insights we may gain. Fire can destroy, as a fiery anger, or fire can heal, as it purifies, burns away the old to make

way for the new. And fire can catalyze new hope in our lives.

So the fire that purifies us, makes us more tolerant, more patient, can actually be a healing fire, a fire that makes us better, a fire that maybe sets us on a new and more productive course. But first we need to remove the obstacles we may have erected for whatever reason in order to make way for a new and more positive and loving way to live. Fire can destroy the invaluable in order to make way for the valuable. Forests repurpose after a fire: the old dry trees and underbrush are not very productive, not very useful for habitat because the vines are too

dense, the dead leaves cause too much darkness on the forest floor, seeds fall but cannot germinate, but new life needs light and a soil that can support new life.

A key issue about fire is how we respond to it. Is the fire that removes our old anxieties and old sinful beliefs a fire that makes way for new and more loving relationships the kind of fire we need? We may be clinging on the old too hard when God is pointing us to more loving relationships, more forgiving relationships, more God-like relationships.

When we forget the struggling, the downcast, the last, the least and the lonely, we make ourselves less human, too robotic.

A fire that purifies our motives, points us toward a better direction in life, is a healing fire, a fire that we can embrace.

The second F, future, is a concern many of us have. What sort of future life will we have? And how to we succeed in gaining the future that we seek?

A good future is one which we need to build. A positive future is a future that brings us joy, but it is a future that also makes us better persons. Someone asked me how to have a better relationship with a

significant other, a person that we love, or a person yet to be found. How do we listen better, hear better, and respond better? But we want a future that makes us happy, satisfied, fulfilled, and productive. Will we leave a legacy of purpose or a legacy of dissolution? But we do not want to be enablers of another person's bad habits or addictions, giving them a future that they deep inside do not want.

The future can frighten us. The future can intimidate us. The future can be perilous. So how do we help build a future that will be satisfying and positive?

One jokester said if we do know where we want to go, any direction is good enough. We can be a cork floating in current, just bobbing along, without a care in life, going with the flow, until we reach the waterfall and down we go without being able to come up again. But we humans are not like corks, we cannot just do anything with our bodies, minds, and spirits and hope to recover. Some habits are destructive for us; some habits can be good for us. But we need to choose which habit we want to discourage, and which habit do we want to encourage. One medical professor I heard speak recently said he was known for his passion

to prevent children from buying cigarettes. He had agitated against tobacco companies making their products better tasting so children would be more likely to buy them and get addicted to the nicotine, and thereby shorten their lives appreciably. Then one day his wife saw him smoking alone in the bathroom and pointed out his hypocrisy. It was an embarrassing moment, but when he finally broke his smoking habit, he said his lungs felt so much better; he no longer worried about smelling like smoke; and he saved a lot of money besides. He found that the future he wanted for his children was a future that was better for him as well.

So, envisioning our future to be one of benefit not only for ourselves but for others is a future that we want to desire. We may need to remove our old ways to have a future that will be better for us and for those we love.

Finally, the third F, faith. If we have a faith that is loving, kind, responsive, and caring, we probably have a faith that can get us through those tough times. We need a solid faith in God to guide our ways. We need a faith that will hold us up in our trials and temptations, a faith that lets us breathe, not a faith that stifles us and makes us more self-centered. We need a faith that is

enduring, a faith that we can take into the future without being afraid of every sort of bad news. Jesus was saying that a faith he wanted us to have was a faith that may make us unpopular with our old friends, and even with our family members. Some of our closest friends and relatives want us to be contained just the way we were as children. Then it would be easier to control us. But if we grow up into responsible adults, we may become intimidating to those who don't want us to be better persons, more loving and caring persons. Jesus noted that some of our closest relatives can be our worst enemies. That is a shocking saying, isn't it?

But Jesus wanted the best for us. He wanted us to have a future that we can be proud of. He wanted us to be examples of others of how to live a life of honesty.

It is sometimes easier to be dishonest with ourselves, isn't it? We don't want to see ourselves in a mirror. We want to have a brave exterior, when inside we are so afraid of the next challenge.

So let us set forth our new direction to have a future that helps us help others to a better future for themselves, and a future that is good for us as well.

Remember the two verses from our Psalm 82 today when you seek to serve God

in all persons: “Save the weak and the orphan; defend the humble and needy; Rescue the weak and the poor; deliver them from the power of the wicked.” Then we will be the called the eternal children of the Most High God.

Let the Fire of God purify us. Let us seek a Future of service to others. And let us build a Faith that carries us closer to God, day by day. Amen.

Fire, Faith, and Future

Description: Fire from God may remove the old desires and destiny by giving us a new future of service with faith.

Tags: fire, future, faith, service, love, forest, seeds, security, growth, love, Jesus, God, family, friends, constraints, freedom