

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Transfiguration
Exodus 3:1-14
February 10th, 2019

You might have seen on the news last week that a small Cessna airplane crashed into a Yorda Linda, California neighborhood and caught a residence on fire. You may have seen the disturbing images on television showing neighbors coming from every direction to check out what was going on. The flames attracted the neighbors to the crash site as people were, unwittingly maybe, putting themselves at risk of being struck by falling debris that continued to reign down on the neighborhood.

A fire will attract a crowd. People are curious and they want to see what is going on. It wasn't so different for those in our Gospel text appointed for today. When Jesus, Peter, James and John ascended the mount of transfiguration, they beheld a sight that caused great wonderment. Jesus lit up... He became bright like the sun... and Peter got excited. He was drawn to Jesus like a moth to a flame. He even said, "*It's good that we are here.*" And, for Elijah and Moses Peter wanted to build dwellings. "This is where we want to be. God in His glory and we in His presence. And what better company could there be... the great prophets of the Old Covenant are here with us."

Moses was not much different. He was keeping the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro and came to the west side of the wilderness. There, at Mt. Horeb... which is called the Mountain of God... God appeared to Him, "*in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.*" Just like curious people in a neighborhood southeast of L.A.... Just like Peter, James and John... instead of retreating away from fire, Moses was drawn to it. It says in the text, "*I will turn aside to see this great sight...*"

For Peter in the Gospel and Moses in the Old Testament reading, the bright light... the fire... is the place where God revealed Himself for a purpose. No wonder when God passes before Moses and only shows His backside while hiding Moses in between rocks... even covering him with His hand so he can't get a dangerous look at God's face... No wonder Psalm 119 says, "*Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.*" No wonder Jesus says in John chapter 8, "*I am the light of the world.*" God and light... God and the bright sun... God and fire seem to go together like, well... as Forest Gump would say... like peas and carrots.

If you would, allow me to say a few interesting tidbits about what Moses saw and experienced on this miraculous day on Mt. Horeb. First, the bush that was burning and not being consumed was a thorn-bush. We might wonder why such an unsavory shrub was chosen when the Lord could have picked a noble and lofty tree. Well, the humble thorn-bush represented the humility of Israel as a people despised by the world. And here is God, in the midst of the bush as light. Fire is not the symbol of God. No, rather, God is light and that is what is important here. Isaiah 10 says God is the "light of Israel." 1 John 1 says, "*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.*"

Light is what God is. We may be tempted to think that fire, from its very nature is the source of light. But the Bible does not speak that way. Light, instead, is the condition of life, which is the source of the fire. In the creation, light comes first, then the fire of the sun. And this idea pervades the entire scriptures. Fire, though it does purify and refine, it also destroys. Here the fire looks like affliction for the thorn-bush just as the People of Israel were suffering at the hands of the Egyptians when God called Moses right here, into His special task of leading Israel through the desert and into the Promised Land. The light is God. God reveals... We can see. He is made known. Fire burns, it harms, it consumes... yet we, like those in the Bible, are attracted to fire.

I was maybe 10 years old but I remember it like it was yesterday. I'm walking home from school at the end of the day a neighbor friend of mine is running toward me from the front, waving his hands and shouting an alarming call. He told me that there are fire trucks on our street and that my house was on fire. I started to run... all the while thinking about what could be destroyed... my toys, my bike, my baseball cards... our car... MY MOM!! Fear gripped me as I approach. I could see my mother and she was okay. My father was at work and no one else was in the house. Thankfully the damage was minimal and firefighters saved a vast majority of our house and our things. Though it drew me to it... and the entire street, mind you... this fire put nothing together, did not build anything... it only destroyed what was ours.

Like moths to the flame, Christians are attracted to the fires of destruction. It calls us. It beckons us. It knows our name and we chase after it. It looks attractive. It looks like something we will only watch from a distance but we end up getting too close. Its warmth draws us in. It looks inviting and it makes us feel good.

What's your flame? What fire tempts you and draws you away from the true light – Jesus? Does it look like a job that is more important than your family? Or is it pleasure that is more important than Church on Sunday? Is it a person that entices you? Is it an addiction that you do not want to admit? Is it the passions of the heart that burn and draw you away from God's will for you? There is so much that burns. And burned you will be if you allow fire to dominate over light. The sinful heart burns for what it wants instead of what it needs.

Repent – turn from the fire toward the light. The light that shows us the way. The Light who “IS” the light of the World. The Light that shines brightly... God Himself... on the top on Mt. Horeb. Christ Himself... on the top of that mount of transfiguration.

This is what light does. It illuminates our path. The Word of God, the light, shows us the way in which we live. The Word is His Word of law that show us what to do and not to do. This Word of law is as relevant today as it was when Moses brought it down from the heights of Mt. Sinai. It's His Word for us. Not an optional word but a Word for our life... and a word for our life for the sake of others. The light for our life today is the Law of our Lord. This is how the Law is a light.

The Gospel is a light... a much better light... a light that shows us the way to heaven. It's a light that shines in the darkest hour of Jesus which is such good news to us. Because if the light of God shines during His darkest hour... the hour when He did His greatest work... then it indeed shines during our darkest hour. Trampled by stress... overcome with despair at the loss of a loved one... the disappointments that life keeps handing down when nothing seems to go our way. In the midst of the darkest time is when Jesus shines the brightest. It's when He does His most magnificent work. It's when the promise that He keeps you and will always be with you are bonded to His gift of eternal life for us. Though the way be dark and dreary, our Lord shines as a beacon of light into and through the dark lives of His precious children.

The fire catches our attention... we are drawn to it like a moth. But the light is that which we truly seek after... that which we truly need. The light is better than the fire. There may have been fire at the top of Horeb, but there was no fire, only light, on the top of the Mount of Transfiguration. And even better, there was no fire, only light on Mt. Calvary. The darkest day... even when there was darkness... the sun stood still... the light of Christ was actively dispensing His grace. Thanks be to God. We have a light that will never go out. Our light is Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.