

Firefall: How Law Becomes Life

2 Chronicles 5-7; Acts 2

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Peter Hiatt

Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/firefall-how-law-becomes-life/>

Transcript document prepared by: Heather Eades (eades.heather@gmail.com).

This document was prepared by Heather Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Heather know. Thank you!

Prayer

And so, Lord, I bring myself. I/we bring our insecurity, our shame, our nagging fear, and anxiety—the sense that I'm not enough...that we're not enough, that keeps us hidden. Lord, our self-righteousness, our arrogance—Lord, we bring it all to the table. And our thanksgiving for your life rising in us. For love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, control of self, all of these things—we bring ourselves to the table... at least with our lips, we do it, God. And now we ask that you would preach to our hearts. That you would proclaim the Gospel to us. In Jesus's name we ask it. Amen.

Message

Video clip: *The Proposal* (Movie Trailer)
Touchstone Pictures (2009)

Scene of New York City traffic.

Blank screen with words typed: This is Andrew.

Shows Andrew (Ryan Reynolds) running.

Words on screen: He is really late.

Scene switches to Andrew arriving at the office, spilling coffee all over himself as his boss (Sandra Bullock) walks in swiftly.

Secretary Good morning, Miss Tate.

Andrew peers out from behind desk, and all others duck behind theirs as the boss approaches.

Words on screen: Margaret is Andrew's boss.

Margaret (to Andrew) I need you around this weekend. You have a problem with that?

Andrew No...it's...it's just my grandmother's 90th birthday...It's fine. I'll cancel it!

Scene switches to Margaret looking over Andrew's shoulder at work.

Margaret That your family? They tell you to quit?

Andrew(Picks up phone) Every, Single. Day. -(on phone) Margaret Tate's office.

Words on screen: Margaret has a problem.

Scene switches to Margaret in her supervisors' office.

Boss	Margaret, your visa application is being denied. You're being deported.
Margaret	Deported?! It's not like I'm an immigrant or something—I'm from Canada!
Supervisor	If you're deported, you can't work for an American company.
Boss	If there was any way at all that we could make this thing work...

Andrew pops his head in the doorway.

Andrew	Pardon the interruption...uh...
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Words on screen: Andrew is the solution.

Margaret	I understand the predicament, but there is something you should know. (Pats Andrew on the chest) We are uh...getting married!
Andrew	Who are...?
Margaret	You and I are—
Andrew	We are...
Margaret	...Getting married. (Pats Andrew awkwardly on shoulder) Can't find a love like ours. (Points at bosses) So, are we good?
Boss	Make it all legal, we'll put this whole thing behind us.

Can you imagine getting married for the wrong reason: like just taking care of business, or just wanting somebody's stuff, or just to get into a country?

Can you imagine coming to worship for the wrong reason: like just taking care of business, or just wanting somebody's stuff, or just to get into a kingdom?

Imagine worshipping God not because it was your life but because you felt like you had to...

Can you imagine that?

I'm not sure that we can imagine anything but that. In our current state, swimming against a river of lies, I'm not sure that we can imagine anything but using love for our own purposes while simply loving Love seems to be almost unimaginable—and God is Love. So maybe God starts with our bad motives because they're the only ones we've got?

How many of you have seen that movie: "The Proposal"? You really don't need to see it, because once you've seen the trailer, you know what's going to happen: Sandra Bullock and Ryan Reynolds will go through the motions of Love with bad motives -- greed, lust, self-centeredness and fear. But by going through the motions of Love, their bad motives will turn into good motives; fake love will turn into real love; and they'll actually fall in love, maybe form a covenant of Love, and maybe even give birth to Life.

The Way in which Real Love conquers fake love is called "romance." The joy with which ego is sacrificed to Grace is called "comedy." And the miracle of Love suddenly appearing in the stinky manger of each of our self-centered hearts is called "the Gospel."

<p>Video clip: <i>The Proposal</i> Touchstone Pictures (2009)</p>

Family is seated, gathered together around Andrew (Ryan Reynolds) and Margaret (Sandra Bullock), standing in an embrace in the middle of the room.

Older family member (Betty White) Give her a real kiss!

The couple kiss and then slowly back away from each other, a surprised look on their faces.

Did you see that? Did you see the spark? They're faking their engagement in order to convince everyone that their love is real... so they will all convince the immigration authorities that their engagement is real. But Grandma notices that their kisses lack passion, and so she yells, "Give her a kiss! A real one!" They fake it... and then make it... or it makes them.

If you are married, I bet that story is also your story in one form or another. But what if you've been married for thirty years? How do you keep the fire burning?

"An Army officer, just home from the wars, was dining alone," writes Fulton Oursler. "He noticed a beautiful woman seated alone at a nearby table. *Not much more than forty*, he thought, *and beautiful! So feminine, so lovely, and attired in such discrete and exquisite style! Why would she be dining alone?* he wondered.

A moment later, he noticed a man being seated at another nearby table. This newcomer was a tall, well-knit man with iron-gray hair... At once [this man] noticed the lonely Lady, so near yet so far.

The look of admiration that flashed into his eyes was unmistakable. Quietly he called the waiter, ordered dinner, and then borrowed the waiter's pencil. Tearing a sheet of paper from a notebook, he wrote a message, folded it, and gave it to the waiter. Now the observer watched intently...

The note was carried directly to the lady. She showed no visible sign of surprise, but with a sweet composure opened the note and read it. Then she folded it, thrust it to one side, and with merely a lift of her eyebrows, dismissed the waiter without any reply at all.

The army officer, watching from the corner, sighed. *Good try*, he thought. *What a shame... They would've made a lovely couple.*

He then watched the gentleman attack his dinner: roast beef, Yorkshire pudding. The lady, meanwhile, teased a lambchop in a frilly little paper pantalette.

After a time, the tall gentleman paid his bill. "He stood up, and for a moment, let sad eyes linger on the unresponsive lady. Then he crossed over to her table."

He bent low and whispered a few words. She stared at him blankly and made no sound. Even when the tall gentlemen pulled out a chair and sat down beside her, still she said not a word to him. The waiter... brought the lady's bill. The gentleman reached for it, but with an imperious gesture, she stopped him. Leaving a pound note in the waiter's hand, she rose, and her visitor stood up with her. He followed her out into the spring night, and the observer in the corner never saw them again.

"He turned to the waiter chuckling, as he said, "This is a fine sort of thing...Flirtations going on in a fine restaurant like this."

"Then he noticed the waiter's face. The light in the man's eyes was like a prayer."

"Ah, sir," he said, "you do not understand!" [I don't know if he had a French accent, but he should've!] "What you have seen tonight is a great love. This is the 26th time I have seen it. I saw it happen the very first time. That was how it began.

Twenty-six years ago, at those very same tables, I served them both that night as I did tonight. With one glance, they fell in love. I carried a note to her then, and when she didn't answer, he got up and came over anyhow. He was that smitten with her! And God bless them both, he is still that smitten with her and she with him. Every year on the anniversary of their first meeting, they come here and go through the whole drama again, and may that love never, never, never die."ⁱ

Fulton Oursler writes that the story was told to him by a man who couldn't remember where he heard it, and so he didn't know if it actually happened. But maybe it is actually happening right now.

At one point, each of us dined alone, and God himself wrote a note and wrapped it in human flesh... and we wrapped it in swaddling clothes and placed it in a manger. He crossed over. He bent low. He paid the bill. And he placed it on the table. He said, "Do this in remembrance of me."

If we just do this... perhaps it's only an empty ritual; but if we do this remembering him, the fire might fall.

Song of Solomon 8:6 · "...love is strong as death, jealousy [passion] is fierce as the grave [literally "fierce as hell (sheol)"] Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord [Shalbebethyah]."

That's the verse we preached on last time as we continued to talk about Solomon, and the fact that we're all being taken on a walk. "Come on take a little walk with me baby and tell me, who do you love?"

The Walk is a Romance and a Comedy; it's the Gospel.

Well... when Solomon was a young man, his father David gathered together all the leaders of Israel and charged Solomon in their presence, saying:

1 Chronicles 28:10, 20 · **"Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a temple [a house] as a sanctuary. Be strong and do the work."**ⁱⁱ

That, by the way, is the reason we call our church "The Sanctuary." Not because it's like a "safe place." The temple was hardly what people would call "a safe place." In one sense, there was no place in this world less safe than the temple. But in another sense, there could be no place safer.

Well, David gives Solomon, the son of David, all the plans for the temple according to the Holy Spirit's instructions, and then charges him saying:

"Be strong and courageous and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you, until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished."ⁱⁱⁱ

About fifteen years ago, I was reading 1 Chronicles 28 in bed—I do that once every three decades or so.

Well, I read it a couple of times through, thinking, *I bet there's something important here, but I'm so tired that I'm just not getting it.*

In the morning, I opened my emails and found a note from a woman I didn't know at the time—although she's part of our church now. She wrote, "Peter, I know you can get discouraged, and I know you're facing some matters with the head of the church, but do not lose hope..."

Then she cited 1 Chronicles 28:20.

Then my world blew up, and then we all started building The Sanctuary.

Well anyway, David, gave instructions to the son of David and then died. Three years later, Solomon started building the Sanctuary, the Temple.

Solomon wrote Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, but before he wrote the Song of Solomon 8:6 "Love is... the very flame of Yahweh"...before he wrote that, I bet he dedicated the temple.

2 Chronicles 7:1 • **As soon as Solomon finished his prayer** [while dedicating the temple], **fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.**

Now let me remind you that this wasn't the first time something like this had happened.

At the dawn of recorded history, 2000 years before Christ, God called Abraham and cut a covenant for Abraham. It's the first instance of fire in Scripture: Abraham saw a flaming torch and a pot of fire pass between the halves of animals that he had sacrificed earlier that day... as God made unconditional promises to Abraham.

Not much later, fire falls on Sodom and Gomorrah after Abraham begs God to save Sodom and Gomorrah. It's easy to wonder whether the fire is good or evil.

About 500 years later, Moses sees the fire on a bush that isn't consumed. As Moses leads the people out of Egypt, they follow a pillar of fire. When God comes down on the mountain, he comes down as fire.

It was to Moses that God gave the detailed instructions for the building of the Tabernacle, which functioned as a mobile temple. The day they dedicated the tabernacle, "the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed... the... offering on the altar" and all the people fell down and worshipped.^{iv} They were to keep that fire going *perpetually*—like eternal fire.^v

About 500 years after that, King David built an altar on Mt. Moriah... and fire came down from heaven and consumed the offering. And that's how David decided upon the location of the temple.^{vi}

- We read about that in 1 Chronicles 21.
- In 1 Chronicles 28, David tells Solomon to "do the work."
- In 2 Chronicles 5, Solomon and all Israel have "done the work."

It has involved stonemasons, carpenters, artists, accountants, kings, peasants, and everything in between... plus, a journey of a thousand years, all in order to build this temple.

And now the priests take the Ark from the Tabernacle and place it in the inner sanctuary of the temple...as other priests offer more sheep and oxen than anyone can count...and as 120 other priests blow trumpets...and as musicians and choirs lead all the people in a song.

2 Chronicles 5:13 · "...and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD,

**"For he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever,"**

the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, ¹⁴ so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

The priests can't stand, but Solomon stands before the altar, then kneels, and then prays the most beautiful of prayers, asking that "all the people of the earth" would know the Lord as Israel knows the Lord.^{vii}

He then prays:

"And now arise, O Lord God, and go to your resting place."^{viii}

[It's at that point that the priests must've put the ark in the Inner Sanctuary—the Inner Sanctuary which is the very presence of the age to come, when all is at rest, for all is filled with God who is a "consuming fire."]

2 Chronicles 7 · ¹As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. ² And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. ³ When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."

It's like they can't stop singing that line—it's actually the most repeated line in Scripture: It's repeated something like 42 times, mostly in the Psalms.

They can't stop singing it... And as they sing it, they offer 22,000 more oxen and 120,000 more sheep. They feast for seven days, and add an eighth, which is the Hebrew picture of an endless Seventh Day and the age to come. They party until Solomon sends them to their homes, "joyful and glad of heart."^{ix}

When the fire filled the temple, all of that work became a dance. It was as if the law had been filled with life.

They sang: "He is good, for his steadfast Love endures forever."

Many have sung it; few seem to believe it.

Adam and Eve couldn't sing it, for they didn't know what it was.

They couldn't sing "*He is good*," for they didn't know what "Good" is—they had no knowledge of Good or evil.

Jesus said, "None is good but God alone." John writes, "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side (ESV footnote: "Greek *in the bosom of the Father*"), he has made him known." That means Jesus is like the heart of God, or the decision of God, which means the judgment of God... and he is good.

When we take his life, we come to know that he has always given his life—Jesus is the revelation of the Good who is Life, given to us on a tree in a garden. Jesus Christ and him crucified is the revelation of Love.

In the same way, the Ark was the revelation of Love; it was literally the law in stone placed in a coffin and covered with blood, which is revealed as Mercy—that's Life given to us when we definitely don't deserve it. Julian of Norwich agrees with Scripture when she writes: "God is all that is good, and God has made all that is made, and God loves all that he has made."^x

They sang, "He is good."

In reference to God, the word "good" is not simply an adjective but a noun. God is not defined by something else that we call "the good." God is "the Good" which defines everything else that we call "good." But he not only defines "the good," he is "the Good" in everything that's anything, and so evil in you is an emptiness in you, destined to be filled with him, just as the glory of God filled that old stone temple.

They sang, "He is good." ...But very few sing that line, and actually mean it.

Then they sang, "His steadfast love (*Hesed*) endures forever." ...And if you sing that line, and actually mean it, you'll be labeled a heretic and kicked out of synagogues and churches.

"His steadfast love endures forever."

In Lamentations, Jeremiah clarifies, writing, "The steadfast love [*hesed*] of the LORD never ceases; his mercies [*rachamim*: tender, compassionate, motherly feelings] never come to an end."

They never come to an end... Why? —Because they are the End.

Hell cannot be the end if *rachamim* is the End, if *hesed* is the End, if *Steadfast Love* is the End—in other words, if "*Jesus is the End*."

He said, "I am the Beginning and the End."^{xi}

They sang, "He is good... his steadfast love endures forever." —I doubt they really meant it in 2 Chronicles 5, but they sang it, for David had commanded them to sing it, over and over and over again in the Psalms. I doubt they really meant it in 2 Chronicles 5, but they couldn't stop singing it in 2 Chronicles 7... after the Fire filled the temple.

Love had been a law to them. And now it was a life within them... after the Fire filled their temple.

Tony Campolo told Larry Crabb, who shared the story with me one night at dinner at my house— Tony told Larry that the night he married his wife Peggy (who was the daughter of a pastor and supposedly a Christian), the night he married her, she told him that she just didn't believe in God, so Tony could just say his prayers without her.

Tony said, "Imagine that, Larry! I'm a Baptist evangelist, and my wife doesn't believe in Jesus." She didn't believe, but she believed in doing loving things.

Years later, she was visiting a dying old woman, when this woman said to Peggy, "Would you pray for me to receive Jesus into my heart." Peggy knew the words, and so she led that woman in the prayer. And then all at once, she knew that she knew God is love and Jesus is the word of Love. She believed; Fire had filled the temple.

When I was a youth pastor in LA, we had a canoe trip designed to introduce the youth to Jesus. And we had a Mexico mission trip designed for the kids who were supposedly already committed to Jesus. And the kids kept giving their life to Jesus... on the wrong trip.

I'd give a great talk at the campfire on the canoe trip, and nothing would happen... and eventually no one wanted to go canoeing anymore and we had to cancel the trip. But on the Mexico trip, kids would do loving things in the day and then tell me that they had come to believe in Jesus that night around the campfire. We eventually had to schedule several Mexico trips each year, because Fire had filled the temple.

Years ago, a woman sent me an email in which she explained that she'd always gone to church with friends and took communion to fit in. But the previous Sunday, she had been thinking, *I really need to surrender my heart to Jesus*. When the bread was passed down the aisle, as we used to do, she took a piece, placed it in her mouth, and tried to swallow.

She told me, "Peter, it wouldn't go down. I was literally choking during the singing. I ran out of the service, stood out back, and said, 'OK, Jesus, you can come in!' ... and then I swallowed. And now I'm a believer." Fire had filled the temple

She began to love God, just as Ryan Reynolds began to love Sandra Bullock, and Sandra Bullock began to love Ryan Reynolds in that movie. There was Fire in the kiss. (*Proskuneo* is Greek for "worship"; it literally means "to kiss.")

So go to worship and pray for fire in the kiss. Try to do the deeds of Love, and invite the fire that is Love. And it's not just how the fire comes to you, it's how the fire is maintained within you, grows within you, and eventually, becomes you...like that couple, celebrating their 26th anniversary by doing "the things, the works, they did at first."

To the Angel of the Church in Ephesus, Jesus says, "I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first... repent and do the works you did at first."

When I was a kid, I was required to kiss my sisters. But in 11th grade, I kissed a girl and there was fire in that kiss. I married that girl, and the fire proved to be life—life that even took the form of four children.

And yet over the ensuing decades, there have been plenty of times that it's felt as if the fire has grown cold. But when that happens, I know what to do: I make reservations, I schedule some time

alone together... and I try to be nice. I try to do the loving things we did at first, and then I don't only feel the loving feelings I felt at first—I feel those things (or at least some of those things) but I feel them on a deeper level and in a much deeper way. And hopefully one day, some French waiter will say to some observer sitting in the corner, "What you have seen tonight is a great love."

Some members of the synagogue approached the great Rabbi, Abraham Heschel, and told him that the liturgy—the prayers and songs—didn't express what they were feeling. And the great Rabbi responded, "It's not for the liturgy to express what you are feeling, but for you to learn to feel what the liturgy is expressing."

We are to say loving things that we might feel loving feelings.

And yet, I need to warn you that you must never intentionally lie about the fire, like Sandra Bullock and Ryan Reynolds lied about love in that movie, "The Proposal."

Immediately after the Fire falls on the tabernacle in the wilderness in Leviticus 9, and all the people began to worship, two of the sons of Aaron take fire, put it in their censers (their little fire pots), and try to offer it on the altar; Scripture calls it "strange fire" or "unauthorized fire." When they do this, fire comes out of the Holy of Holies and consumes them.

When you say things like, "Oh, I feel such incredible love for God," and you don't feel such incredible love for God, I think you're offering "strange fire." The world looks and thinks, "All the fire is fake; there is no fire." And I believe God says, "Stop taking my name in vain."

So, instead of that, try to do loving things, try to say loving words, and when you don't feel love, when you don't love Love, confess yourself to Love, saying, "I don't think I love Love," and then call on Love to fill the temple.

If you confess that you don't love Love but call on Love, you won't be burned by Love when Love does fill the temple. And Love will fill the temple; make no mistake, the Fire will fall.

So, what does it look like when the Fire does fall?

Well, in Sodom, they didn't love Love—they didn't care for the poor, and they used sex like a weapon—they didn't love Love, and so rejected Love, and then they were consumed by Love that burned like fire.

Ezekiel promises that God will make Sodom new—but the process does look rather painful.

In 2 Chronicles, they do the work of love:

- They build the temple.
- They make sin offerings. They make thank offerings... sheep and goats.
- They say the words of love—they sing the songs of love.
- They present the offerings of love.

And they aren't burned by love; instead, they're filled with love for God and each other. They can't stop singing and sacrificing and feasting and partying until Solomon sends them home, "joyful and glad of heart."

So, what they were required to do becomes the very thing they passionately wanted to do; so what they did do was experienced as freedom. We'll talk about that next week. But you see, it's as if each of us is a temple—and Love lives in the depth of each temple behind a curtain, where at first we each are afraid to go.

The thing that doesn't love Love is your ego, your flesh. And the thing that does love Love is the breath of God deep within you. When Christ sets us free, he sets us free from our own ego...and free to love God and everyone around us... because we want to.

When Love is a law, we perceive it as “the fire without”—and it is. But when we surrender to Love, we see that it is the fire within—the veil is ripped and the breath of God, the fire within, fills the whole temple.

One night years ago, I felt the fire so intensely that I thought I was going to die—and strangely enough, I was happy to die, for I knew that dying would be living—truly living, for the first time. I was literally pinned to the floor, my whole body was on fire, and it was like I just couldn't stop worshipping because I couldn't conceive of ever wanting to stop worshipping.

Jesus told me to stop doubting his love for me. And he pulled back the curtain on all my reality. I saw that wherever I had been loved or did love, wherever I had experienced something good or done good, wherever I had lived life or given life—it wasn't me; it was him to me, in me, through me, and all around me—the fire.

I think he told me in a language deeper than words, “Peter, it's not about this wild experience that you're having right now; it's not about signs and wonders. It's all about love... And I am Love, and Love is Eternal Fire.”

Perhaps, we're meant to fall in love with the fire as a single flame burning in the darkness... before the entire world is consumed by the fire. Perhaps we're to fall in love with a kind deed here and a nice word there when we don't entirely feel like being nice... before Love himself fills all things with himself: the unquenchable fire.

Did you know that fire is basically oxidation... and life is basically oxidation? Fire is basically the energy emitted when organic matter reacts with oxygen. And the energy that you call “your life” is basically the energy emitted when the organic matter inside of you (we call it food) reacts with the oxygen you breathe—that's why we refer to exercise as burning calories.^{xii}

Perhaps the Fire that will consume all things already burns behind a curtain in the depths of every human soul.

Well anyway...

- Abraham saw the fire fall.
- And 500 years later, Moses saw the fire fall.
- And 500 years after that, Solomon saw the fire fall and fill the temple.
- And 500 years after that, the Jews stood in a reconstructed temple and sang, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever... toward Israel”^{xiii}

But there was no firefall... just a prophecy from Malachi:

“The Lord whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple... but who can endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire.”^{xiv}

And 500 years after that, Jesus suddenly came to the temple. He cleansed it of moneychangers taking care of business, and he cried out, “My Father’s house will be a house of prayer for all peoples.” He also said, “Destroy this temple and in three days I’ll raise it up.” And so they tried to destroy him, but as you know, he rose on the third day.

For forty days, he appeared to his disciples and told them to wait for the promise of the Father—the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the baptism of Fire.

And so they waited, but waiting was not just doing nothing. Waiting was “doing the work”; it was building the temple. They gathered together like living stones; in the upper room, they prayed. And on the 50th day, the day of Pentecost, the fire fell.

Acts 2:3 · Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

They began to worship in ecstasy—people thought they were drunk. They “loved the Lord their God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength.” And they began to sell all their possessions and share everything in common. They “loved their neighbors as they loved themselves.”

Love was no longer a law for them; Love was the life burning within them. And of course, it didn’t only happen once, and then it was over... Over and over and over again, we must “do the work” and wait on the Lord for the fire to fall.

It seems to me that that is exactly what we, the Sanctuary, ought to be doing right now. The pandemic is over... So why don’t we come together and build the Sanctuary? Not bricks and budgets but living stones.

Why don’t we come together in person and wait on the Lord? And if you can’t come in person, then come in spirit, as you worship online.

People sometimes ask, “What can I do for the church?”

#1. Come to worship and call on the fire. (Love God with all that you are.)

#2 Join a community group and call on the fire. (Love your neighbor as yourself.)

So... are you ready to call on the fire?

This whole service, you’ve been wondering if I’m going to light this fire...[Peter pretends to light fire in fire pit.] Well, I’m not going to light the fire; God must light the fire. And I don’t want to fake the fire, but I hope to testify to the fire. And besides, this isn’t the container for the fire...[Peter holds up fire pit.] And this isn’t the fuel for the fire...[Peter points to the wood in the firepit.]

[Peter switches fire pit out and replaces with the communion bread.] This is the fuel.

Communion

The Lord whom we sought suddenly came to his new temple: twelve insecure, frightened, lonely, confused disciples, gathered in the upper room (the same room in which the fire would fall fifty days later).

He took bread and broke it, saying, “Take and eat. This is my body, which is for you” And in the same manner, he took the cup, saying “This is the new covenant in my blood. As often as you drink this cup, do it in remembrance of me.”

When we come together, we literally “re-member” his body, which is the temple; we bring the members together like living stones. And, into that temple, we place the fuel for the fire. Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me”^{xv} And then two chapters later, he said, “Eat me. Drink me. I’m your food. My flesh is your food.”^{xvi}

We place the fuel (bread) in the Temple and call on the Oxygen (the oxygen is in the blood, and in the air all around you [Peter inhales]).

And we wait—we wait to be caught up in the Love that is God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In other words, we work at worship until worship begins to work us, and our lives become the Life of the living God—the dance that is Love.^{xvii}

In Jesus’s name, believe the Gospel, ingest the Gospel, and become the Gospel. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

So, Lord God, we praise you. And all thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea. And we thank you that you allow us to praise you now. In Jesus’s name. And Father, it’s our custom to say “Amen” at the end of sermons, but we say it incorrectly most of the time because we think it means “Stop!” —And it doesn’t mean “stop”; it means “for sure.” So, “For sure,” Amen.

But don’t stop. Don’t stop praising God, don’t stop waiting on God. You read the story of Acts, and the fire fell, and they had this amazing experience. But then they had to go out and deal with all the garbage you have to deal with every day of the week, and then they come back and wait some more. Fire falls. And one day the Fire will fall, and we’ll become creatures of Fire.

You know, it’s pretty cool, in the gospels it says that after the supper that night, the disciples sang a hymn and went out.^{xviii}

Scholars say that the hymn they would have sung was most likely Psalm 118, for that is what the Jews always sang after supper on the Passover. It begins this way, “Oh give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” And it ends this way, “Oh give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.”

We’re a small church, but I think we’re beginning to sing those words and mean them. “He is good” that’s why we’re on this journey—to see that he’s Good. To see Jesus Christ and him crucified. That’s the revelation of the Good.

“His steadfast love endures forever.” (He is good everywhere, and all the time.)

And so at forty days you remember Jesus ascends, and then at fifty days, the fire falls, and then in the Gospel of John, he appears to John, and John can't stand. Why? Because Jesus is on fire—his face shines like the sun. And he bends down and he says, "John, it's me. Get up." One day he's going to cross over, bend down and say to you, "Steve, Scott, Mike, Marilyn—it's me!"

And so dear Sanctuary, keep waiting, singing, and may the Fire fall. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Fulton Ourlser, *Modern Parables* (Garden City NY: Permabooks, 1952), pp. 169-172

ⁱⁱ 1 Chronicles 28:10 (NIV)

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Chronicles 28:20 (NIV)

^{iv} Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. -Leviticus 9:22-24

^v ¹² The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall arrange the burnt offering on it and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. ¹³ Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out. - Leviticus 6:12-13

^{vi} And David built there an altar to the Lord and presented burnt offerings and peace offerings and called on the Lord, and the Lord answered him with fire from heaven upon the altar of burnt offering. Then the Lord commanded the angel, and he put his sword back into its sheath. At that time, when David saw that the Lord had answered him at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, he sacrificed there. For the tabernacle of the Lord, which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time in the high place at Gibeon, but David could not go before it to inquire of God, for he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the Lord. Then David said, "Here shall be the house of the Lord God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel." - 1 Chronicles 21:26-22:1

^{vii} 2 Chronicles 6:33

^{viii} 2 Chronicles 6:41

^{ix} 2 Chronicles 7:10

^x Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 10

^{xi} CHECK OUT THE PROGRESSION OF THESE THREE VERSES TOGETHER:

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” - **Revelation 1:8** (Definitely God Almighty talking)

And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. - **Revelation 21:5-6** (Could be God the Father, or God the Son, or maybe even God the Spirit, talking)

“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” - **Revelation 22:12-13** (Definitely Jesus talking)

The End of all things (and Beginning of all things) is the Divine Decision (the Judgement) that we call “love,” which is God himself.

xii The Fire that will consume all things, burns behind a curtain in the depths of every human soul...

xiii And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, according to the directions of David king of Israel. ¹¹ And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord,

“For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.”

And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away. -Ezra 3:10-13

‘Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not. For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts. ⁹ The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts.’” -Haggai 2:3-9

xiv Malachi 3:1-2

xv John 4:34

xvi John 6:55

xvii There is a story, set in the deserts of Egypt, and at least fifteen hundred years old, that serves as a metaphor, a picture, for the renewing, reviving work of God at the Toronto Airport vineyard. It takes place between two monks, a junior and a senior; two men who have committed their lives to loving God with all their hearts, and practising hospitality and blessing to any who would come for counsel and spiritual guidance, for prayer, ministry and healing.

Brother Lot went to see Brother Joseph and said: 'Brother, as much as I am able, I practise a little fasting, some prayer and meditation, and remain quiet, and as much as possible I keep my thoughts clean. What else should I do?'

The old man stood up and stretched out his hands towards heaven, and his fingers became like ten torches of flame. He said, 'Become *FIRE!!!*' (1)

- Yushi Nomura, *Desert Wisdom: Sayings from the Desert Fathers*, Image Books, New York, 1984. p. 90.

xviii Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26