

Ash Wednesday
02/22/2023
Burning for Good!

Years ago, 38 years ago to be precise, I got to go on a 2-week 64 mile back packing Scout High Adventure in the Mountains of Cimarron, New Mexico.

This is a long time to camp and has everything you need without any support. The only thing we would resupply enroute was food distributed throughout at appointed stations for us to pick up when we ran out.

Otherwise, everything you needed for sleeping, hygiene, clothing, weather protection, making fires, cooking, and bear deterrent; all had to be carried on your person.

That meant roughly 2 changes of clothes you would alternate each day, including underwear. I know, gross. But technically, you could get two wearing's in, then turn them inside out for two more, before they really needed washing.

But washing was the hard part, because soap, dish soap, and laundry soap, was very heavy, and we packed without it.

Now if you know anything about Scouts, you know we have the 12 points of the Scout Law.

Trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.

And our leadership was serious about those points in every situation we found ourselves in, so no cranky scouts, no foolishness with money, please and thank you, sir, worship on Sundays even in camp, and looking after one another in need.

But even when we're camping out in the wilderness for a couple of weeks, you had to keep clean. This was important to keep from getting sick and ruining the trip for yourself and everyone else.

But how in the world did you keep clean without shaving cr me, soap, laundry soap, and dish soap?

Well, the first thing you need to understand is; it gets cold in the mountains at night even in the middle of the summer, temps can drop into the 50's no problem even if it was in the 80's during the day.

So, we always had a campfire to: warm ourselves by, help keep the bears at bay, and cook on.

But fire danger in the dry climate of New Mexico was very serious and we had to make sure the fire was completely out after we hung our food supplies in the air 20 feet off the ground and 20 feet from the nearest trees, it was suspended from, to make sure bears couldn't get at it once the fire was no longer there to scare them away.

And we did that by dumping as much water on it as possible and creating an ash soup.

And that ash soup was what we used to clean our eating plates, our hands, and when we were grungy and the smell was too much, we would actually use it to bath our necessities!

And it really worked! First the ash was completely purified and acted like a mechanic's soap for greasy hands.

The grit of the ash and the hot water *would clean us very well!* Yeah we were a little ashy, but a quick dip in the streams solved that problem and we slept purified from all the grunge of the trail the last couple of days.

As we begin Lent tonight with Ash Wednesday, we participate in the *imposition of ashes*. "This ancient act is a gesture of repentance and a powerful reminder about the meaning of the day.

Ashes can symbolize dust-to-dustness and remind worshippers of the need for cleansing, scrubbing, and purifying."

(Lutheran Worship *History and Practice* Pg. 166)

Ash Wednesday helps us prepare for the purifying devotion and worship of Lent; because Lent is the time when we realize the dirt of sin stains our souls and needs to be burned away like dross.

Years ago, I had a friend that did not like God commanding that we heap burning coals on our enemy's head.

As far as he was concerned therefore, we should not take the Bible as inerrant and infallible because of that verse.

The verse he was referring to could be found in Romans 12:20. Which when you read it is not a bad thing. It's about forgiving your enemy and feeding your enemy... "for in doing so you heap burning coals on his head"

But my friend could only understand the burning coal as a bad thing, nonetheless.

This troubled me for years because I could not answer why God used the metaphor of burning coals, and our pastor could not either and thus we lost our dear friend to a church that did not believe in the inerrancy and inspiration of God's word.

When I got to seminary, I told a professor about this interaction that still troubled me. And he shared with me that the word used for burning coals in Romans was the same word translated from Hebrew into Greek in Isaiah 6:6, where the angel responds to Isaiah's concern that he is a man of unclean lips by touching his lips with a burning coal, and then said, "Behold this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, your sin atoned for."

Oh, had I just known God's word well enough to know that I could have shared that wonderful promise with him. In God's word, burning coals do not harm us, burning coals purify us from all sin!

Like the refiner who smelts Gold and Silver until it shines clean, the crucible works to burn off the impurities until the refiner can see their face clearly in the reflection of the liquid metal.

So, Jesus refines us, spiritually, until He can see His face in our hearts, body, and soul; reflecting His love for a world that needs saving.

Years ago, Brian Kneser, the pastor emeritus at Woodlands came to visit our Faith Sonshine group and was the keynote speaker for their annual tea party.

His devotion was "We Should Reflect the Light of Christ"

At one point in the devotion, he hilariously pointed out that they should not be call Faith Sonshine, because they are not the Son of God creating light; rather like the moon above the earth, they should reflect the light of the Son. So, they should be called the Faith Moonshiners!

Either way in this season of Lent we will be burned by God and moonshine for Him!

Burned and purified of the sins we reflect on that caused our sinful fall from Grace, but ready to be cleansed by the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit!

John the Baptist told us so, in Matthew 3:11b, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with FIRE (Emphasis mine)”

So, this season of Lent we will baptize you with Fire and the Holy Spirit as we discuss the fruits of the Spirit.

The expectation of Fruit, The Nature of Good Fruit, Good Fruit vs Bad Fruit, The Source of Good Fruit, and Gifts for Growing Fruit.

Each week, episodically, Pastor Moore, Pastor Spaeth, and I will bring the Baptism of the Holy Spirit with Fire and burn the dross of our sins with the pure Word of the one true God who saved us and redeemed us by the blood shed for us on the cross.

Burning for Good!

AMEN

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