

Before I came here, one of the congregations I served was Duck Creek Lutheran Church. Inside the ~~shure~~ white wooden church that could seat fifty at the most, on ~~the~~ the altar sat a candle, what we all know as an eternal light. Out there in the barren hills of Northwestern South Dakota people pretty much did things just the way they wanted to do them, without much concern for what was right or expected. The Lutheran church could change to red and green hymnals, but they still used their blue Concordia Hymnal, first published back in the 1930's, by Lutherans who had come from Norway. So on the altar sat the eternal light, which they lit at the beginning of worship, and quenched when it was time for all of us to go home. Not very eternal was that light, but that is the way things were done at Duck Creek.

I am sure that they put out the candle each week simply to be practical. But as I prepared for this morning I realized something that had never occurred to me while I was there. If the flame of that candle symbolizes the presence of God, maybe we all ought to snuff it out, when we leave. What is the promise, where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them. Or as St. Paul wrote, Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? We go out the door, and God goes with us.

This morning a candle will be lit, during the baptismal service. Its flame will be apparent for all to see. But we believe a far more significant flame seen only by God will be planted in the heart of Janice Lynn, The flame of the Holy Spirit.

Do not quench the Spirit. A simple command that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in our second lesson, Do not quench the spirit.

I look at all of you in whom the flame of the Holy Spirit was lit on the day of your baptism and I sense the Holy responsibility I have been granted.

*In Zorba the Greek by Nikos Kazantzakis a man told the two boys Alexis I'm going to tell you a secret. You're too small to understand now, but you'll understand when you are bigger. Later, little ones; neither the seven stories of heaven nor the seven stories of earth are enough to contain God but a man's heart can contain him. So be very careful Alexis never to wound a man's heart.*

Do not quench the spirit.

Sometimes within me the flame is only the barest flicker. I feel alone, afraid, anxious. cold. Sin is a glass that seals out the oxygen of God's love. I gasp for life.

Sometimes it is the cold blast of the indifference of others that threatens that flame. People run over me. No one takes time to care. To listen.

Do not quench the spirit.

It is a sobering thought to realize that I am not dealing with numbers or statistics that show my success or failure but with the flickering flame ~~is~~ of the spirit in each of your hearts. Where God is able to use me to increase faith, there the flame burns more brightly, the heart is warmed.

Do not quench the spirit.

Not only you have been granted the privilege of being the lamp in which the Holy Spirit burns, everyone who is baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is the temple of God. I see your faults, you see mine. We so easily give up on one another. Lose any faith in one another, Or more importantly in the power of God's spirit to overcome sin in our neighbors. Do not quench the spirit.

I think of lambs in the spring. Full of a spirit of playfulness, and joy and bouncing;

I think of children whose eyes sparkle, who want to try everything, and don't much like sitting still, who like to laugh.

Do not quench the spirit.

Advent is a time of repentance. A time to clear away all the debris. A time to take a hammer and break that glass of sin that starves the flame of air. These are the days for letting go of fear, and anxiety, to throw off the crushing weight of guilt, and all the shoulds and musts, and to dance and sparkle and live.

That is possible because we are on our way to Bethlehem. There we shall see our Lord who never snuffs out the flame in a human heart but who treasures that flame, and protects it from every cold blast and all sin that would starve

starve it. He wants to make every one of us as new and as fresh and alive <sup>and vibrant</sup>  
as he is <sup>in his mother's arms</sup> ~~at the manger hay.~~

Sometimes Christmas makes me very angry. Sue has at times thought that I was the incarnation of Ebenezer Scrooge. But last week I think I discovered why. It is the shoulds, the law that goes with Christmas, I should send a card, I should write a letter, I should buy a gift, I should decorate, I should, I should, I should. Until by the time Christmas comes there has been no dancing flame, no joy, only a bone weary exhaustion.

Do not quench the spirit. Think about what you are doing in these days, who you are doing it for.

I invite you to carry these words in your hearts these days:

Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks ~~to~~ in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the spirit, hold fast to what is good, abstain from what is evil.

Hear these words and do them.

The blessing I leave you onw at the end of this sermon is this: May the God of peace himself sanctify you through and through; and may your spirit soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful and he will do it.