

I picked up the latest issue of the Nature Conservancy News yesterday. I opened to an article ~~entitled, The Fate of the Missing Disturbance~~. The first part of ~~the article~~ ^{which} was about a Prairie Preserve in North Central South Dakota. The article told how important fire was to properly managing this 7600 acres of original prairie. Before the coming of the white settlers Indian fires and lightning regularly led to to grasses of the prairie being consumed by fires. The old growth was consumed, making way for the new, fresh, vibrant growth.

Today, the Nature conservancy finds that in order to ~~max~~ preserve the original prairie that regularly it must be burned. Though their work is most often to keep the original from being disturbed, in the case of the prairie the must see to it that fire does disturb the growth that life there be enhanced.

Jesus said, "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!"

I remember the first time that I saw a controlled burning. Ahead, over the hill as I drove along rose the clouds of dark smoke. I wondered if the fire department had been called, the neighbors alerted. Obviously it was a disaster. As I topped the hill there stood men, calmly watching the fire. They wanted the grass to burn, but I could not imagine why. Later I learned about controlling the weeds through fall burning, getting rid of the old growth, making way for the new.

The next spring as I saw the brightest green grass springing from the blackened soil, I understood.

I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled.

Jesus gave his life.

Paul said it this way, "While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man- though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

He gave his life for the ungodly, the undeserving, every one who could

never pay him back.

The old growth accumulates. Take care of yourself, no one else will.
Look out for old number one. Give to people what they deserve. No one
could ask more.

All of that ^{is} obvious. Especially in our age of standing up for our
own rights. Don't work too hard, don't care too much, don't give any more than
the next guy.

But he gave his life. It burns the old growth. Green fresh new life
springs forth in giving.

I think of a friends whose first child was seriously disabled. Shortly
after birth the experts said the child should be institutionalized. No hope,
they said, don't wear yourselves out for nothing they told the parents. But
the parents would not be sensible, they loved life into that child day after
day, they loved miracles or growth and improvement and development into that
child. ~~and they found as they gave they received more than they had ever before~~

You all know families here in our midst who share this same story.

I came to cast fire upon the earth.

The cross of Jesus is a fire. He gave himself for you and I and we never
did nor never will deserve it. ~~It is a fire that burns every claim that would~~
~~make us proud~~ The debt we can never repay burns the old growth, making way for
the new, the fresh, the alive.

Left to myself I am like a plot of ground that is never grazed, never
tended. Left to myself I grow up into weeds. Everything and everybody is
only important as they bring happiness to me. I only talk about me, I only
do everything for me. My trinity become me, myself and I. My only God.

The fire destroys, the fire makes new. The fire is the cross of Jesus
Christ. He judges me there ^{even} as he gives his life ~~for~~ for me. Dying for me,
he burns the old growth there, making room for me to follow him.

Christ died for you. Let that fire cover your heart. *Give yourself as he*

has given himself for you. Amen.