

*49 "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! 51 Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! 52 From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; 53 they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."*

*54 He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. 55 And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. 56 You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"*

Fire.

Wednesday was cold, rainy. We were at Sue's cabin in the mountains of Colorado. Sue started a fire in the wood stove. Dancing flames - glowing embers - we were warmed by the fire.

Fire.

Days were hot and dry when we arrived in Colorado. Signs and messages proclaimed: No open fires. Colorado was hoping to avoid the devastation racing over parts of California and the Pacific Northwest. Fire.

Fire.

Ten days ago Sue and I were hiking with my sister, Joanne, and her husband, Bill, near Allenspark, Colorado. Suddenly trees gave way to an open area – The park ranger we met on the trail gave that area a name – the Ouzel burn. Years ago fire had raced along that mountainside turning a dry forest into a charred landscape. But as we hiked green was everywhere – young aspen trees – pine trees – red violet fireweed blossoms. New life.

Fire. Our Lord, Jesus, spoke of fire. I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled.

What fire did he come to bring to you and to me? To the earth?

Does Jesus speak of the fire glowing in the wood stove – the warm glow of faith in your heart? Is this the fire that he came to earth to kindle?

Does Jesus speak of a wildfire racing to consume everything in its path, hot, searing, deadly? Did Jesus come to earth to judge – to encounter everything in you and in everyone not worthy of God and to destroy it?

Does Jesus speak of the fire that clears the area – a controlled burn that consumes the dry and the lifeless and provides fertile ground for new growth?

What sort of fire does God's love want for you this day?

For one among us this day God wants a new spark of faith. God's love wants to glow in this one, warm a heart in which hope is almost gone. God wants the faith of Gideon and Barak, Samson and Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets to be ignited in this heart. This fire is the love of God – a hand reaching out to pull you out of the abyss into which you are falling.

For another among us this day God is a fire burning hot, consuming all that is dried out and dead. Dry old grudges scattered – the husks of old pleasures and addictions – secret sins – falsehood – greed. A fire eager to destroy the dead wood of selfishness – of hoarding – of bloated consumption. A fire ready to char the dry needles of gossip, of jealousy, of envy, of judging.

But unless I do not understand Jesus at all, the fire that Jesus brings is to make you new. St Paul tells us: If anyone is in Christ there is a new creation – everything old has passed away – see, everything has become new.

Whether God is intending to ignite the spark of faith in your heart this day or to be a wildfire destroying all that is dry – the purpose is to make you new. Not for your sake – your enjoyment, your pleasure but for your neighbor's sake.

As we walked the edge of the Ouzel burn a hiker who had passed us on the trail was stopped, waiting. He pointed our attention to a brown bird, the size of a small pheasant. It is a ptarmigan he told us. And as we looked we saw a whole Ptarmigan family rustling through the grass. The renewing of the land brought blessing to many creatures.

So it is with you. God wants new hope, new growth, new life in you so that every neighbor who dwells in your life will be blessed.

Jesus said, I came to bring fire to the earth and how I wish it were already kindled.

Jesus' fire comes to you and to me. Your whole life may be a series of controlled burns, God's word igniting all that is dead and dry – clearing the space for new growth.

Or you and I can resist God's word. We can try to keep the fire away from all that is dead and dry in us. But a day will come and the fire will erupt. And it will be a great blaze.

But with Jesus there is hope.

When all the burning is done green shoots will appear.