

**SERMON: "FIRED UP"**

**TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT  
NEW TESTAMENT**

**EXODUS 3:1-7, 20:1-21  
MATTHEW 3:11-12**

**June 11, 2023**

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**Sermons in Stained Glass – One**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The church I served in Georgia was 20 minutes away from Columbia Seminary one of the PCUSA's largest seminaries. Being that close, we had a great opportunity to help the church, our particular church and the larger Church by having a full time seminary intern for the summer, a great learning experience. We always asked them to stay on through the school year part time.

Over the years, I was fortunate to work with a dozen different interns, all with unique gifts, including a young woman who had a job with the circus before going to seminary. She knew how to juggle ... and not just juggle. She knew how to juggle fire. We found a way to use that skill in worship. She juggled fire on Pentecost Sunday after the benediction. Outside.

Any fire jugglers here today? None. Actually I think it is more than that, a lot more. When John the Baptist speaks about Jesus, the one who is to come, he says

**I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I, and I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.**

Baptized with fire. Thank goodness we don't take that literally. What exactly does it mean to be baptized with fire?

And how does that fire imagery fit with all the fire imagery in the bible. In our Old and New Testament lessons today and many other verses throughout and on banners above the pulpit ... and in our stained glass windows? Fire imagery is all around us. We might need to learn how to juggle fire.

Let's start in the back of the church. The first window in our series 'Sermons in Stained Glass.' What sermon is that window preaching? The windows are based on the seal of the United Presbyterian Church. That is one of the predecessor denominations of the Presbyterian Church USA. Cedar Heights was part of that denomination until 1983.

In that year, the Northern and Southern churches once split by the Civil War reunited. A beautiful thing, reunion! The symbol of the reunited church hangs there. Probably ought to do a sermon series based on that seal as well. The seal of our predecessor denomination is on the bulletin cover.

## GOT YOUR ATTENTION

Back to the first window and the sermon it is preaching. It is a sermon based on our scripture lessons from Mathew and Exodus. We begin with a burning bush.

**Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness and came to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."**

I just love how the bible translated from Hebrew or Greek into English sounds so very British, proper and polite. Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up."

Translated that means, "Yikes. I got see what's going on here!"

First thing to know about fire ... It gets our attention

It gets our attention period. Sitting by the fireplace or around a campfire  
Smoke on the horizon. It attracts us ... and can also scare us.

And when you see a bush burning but not burning up, that really gets your attention. It got Moses' attention. That's what God was trying to do!

How has God gotten your attention of late? I do hope you've been paying attention.

One of the best lines from any book or movie is from Alice Walker's The Color Purple

*I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it. People think pleasing God is all God cares about. But any fool living in the world can see it always trying to please us back.*

God is at work 24/7 365 days a year getting our attention

Sometimes getting us to stop in all our busyness to appreciate the color purple  
Sometimes to get our attention so as to get us going.

That was certainly the case with Moses. I think it is the case with us too

I think the fires in the windows (there are several) are telling us to sit for a bit

Sit for an hour and listen, listen to what God has to say ... then get going

God spoke to Moses from that fire. Got speaks to us from these fires,  
the ones on the banners and in the windows

Moses' experience with the burning bush is more than sight seeing. It is a sending.

God gets his attention with the fire, then gets him going, telling him ...

**The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. Now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.**

## GET GOING

The fires God sets before us to get our attention also get us going  
You've heard that expression about someone who is motivated  
How someone lit a fire underneath them. Happened to Moses. Happens to us.

Reminds me of the cheer from Walton High School, Cobb County, Georgia  
I'll say it the way I remember it. Before suburban Atlanta got cosmopolitan  
'Get fired uu-up, Big Red fired uu-up! Get fired uu-up, Big Red fired uu-up!'  
We got so fired up we turned a two letter word into a two syllable word.

The Holy Spirit gets us that fired up. Gets us going!  
That is a big part of what I've been trying to do as one of your pastors  
I am very much trying to be a cheerleader and get you 'fired uuuu-ppp'  
Can't be a place for everyone with some get go, without cheerleaders  
Without being fired up to love God and love neighbor.

I really do hope and pray and trust that God has been lighting some fires under you  
God got Moses' attention and got him going, lit a fire under him,  
so he could liberate an oppressed people. Don't you think Gpd is still  
hearing the cries of people trampled underfoot and overlooked?  
Don't you think God is still calling us to the same work as Moses ... liberation?

Look at all these windows, these banners. All the fires God has set  
so as to get our attention ... and get us going  
I sure think that being baptized with fire means getting fired up like that  
Having God light a fire under us to get us going

God sets a fire so as to get our attention, get us going ...  
And to get us going in the right direction  
The top of that first window depicts the burning bush  
The bottom of the window also comes from the stories of Moses

Moses has done what God sent him to do. He has let the people out of slavery,  
out of Egypt. They are now heading to the land God has promised  
Again Moses finds himself at a mountain. Another meeting with God  
This time he gets directions - The Ten Commandments.  
It does help to stop and get directions

Before we talk about how those directions are just as helpful today  
Let's remember where they were. The children of Israel had been living  
for generations under someone else's rules. The slave owners, the Egyptians.  
They desperately need a new set of guidelines, news rules for a new nation

The new nation of Israel needed direction. And God provided that direction!  
And those directions are still well worth following. Still a good framework  
That's how I'd like you to think of the Ten Commandments  
as directions for the journey. Not just stone tablets from back when  
but directions for here and now ... a road map or framework if you will

## SUMMARY

My mentor, Allen McSween, with whom I served at the Presbyterian Church in Bowling Green, Kentucky for 7 years. Yes, the name of the church is 'The Presbyterian Church.' Remember how I mentioned the Presbyterian Church spilt with the rest of the country in the Civil War. The churches reunited in 1983. In Bowling Green they reunited some 30 years earlier.

Allen always talked about the Ten Commandments as the structures or framework of grace. They are God's way of saying this is how you respond to grace. This is how you live and love.

He was quick to point out that the ten commandments are more than a list of 'Thou shall not.' They are not stone tablets meant to be used as a weapon. We misuse them when all we are is moralists, officials eager to blow a whistle. Gotcha. You missed number 4 again.

The ten commandments are for us to be a balanced mix of moralists and activists. It is as much a list of do's as it is don'ts. They are directions, directions as in get going in this direction. Follow.  
Directions, if you will, on how we might juggle fire safely

Let me describe that juggling, that balancing of moralist and activist this way  
My first dog as an adult was Shadrach, a fine and noble beast  
As he got older and wiser, we got another dog. Named her Delilah  
All of our dogs have been a mixture of multiple breeds, except her  
She was a pure bred golden retriever. Got her from a breeder

We got her when she was three. The breeder didn't want her anymore.  
They tried multiple times but could not get her to breed. We paid \$25 for her  
She was very timid when we got her. She'd spent three years in a kennel  
She'd never been more than 6 feet back and forth, back and forth.

Shadrach had to teach her how to enjoy her freedom.  
He showed her all around our fenced in back yard. They walked. They ran.  
It took patience and perseverance. It was both sad and beautiful to watch.  
What made it so beautiful was watching her become happier and happier

As she explored her freedom - chased some squirrels, laid in the sun,  
played, Delilah lived into the joy and fullness of being a dog  
So much so that the dog that couldn't have puppies ... had puppies. Surprise.

Being too much of a moralist sure seems to me like living in a kennel  
Mixing the moralist in each of us with the activist in each of us  
gets us out of the kennel ... and at the same time, keeps us in the back yard  
I like fenced in back yards. Good place to enjoy the dogs  
And to learn how to juggle fire.