

## FIRES OF CREATION

Sermon given by Dan Phillips

At Caroline Valley Community Church

June 19, 2011

Genesis 1:1-5

1In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 5God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day

We have reached the season of Pentecost in the church year. And for our theme this year, we have adopted the image of fire. Fire is mentioned in the story of Pentecost, and is the most enduring image of this event. As we go through this portion of the church calendar, we are exploring the meaning of fire as metaphor and image, and how it relates to our Christian lives.

Fire means passion. It means something that is powerful and alive. Like other forms of life, fire can grow, can reproduce itself, and can move from place to place. It's not really alive, but we can see the similarity between fire and life. And that similarity has led many cultures to see fire as the energy that propels life and that mirrors human passions. We say that someone who is passionate is 'fiery'. We talk of people being 'on fire' for God, or for some other reason. We speak of people who are in love as 'smoldering' with passion. And we will examine what passion means in our existence as both humans and believers.

Fire is also associated with light. Light lets us see things in a different, better way. And passions alter our perception just as light alters our eyesight. Where there is fire, things are looked at differently. We will examine the differences in our spiritual outlook that occur when we become passionate for God and God's ways.

Fire changes things. Fire destroys the old and makes way for the new. Fire eats up the material things that we prize so much, and changes our world, whether we like it or not.

Fire is power. Burning various substances in a controlled way has let us humans do things we could not otherwise do. We burn gasoline to go from place to place. We burn fuel oil, or natural gas,

or coal, or wood, to heat our houses. We have harnessed fire to build the civilization we enjoy today.

And fire is ambiguous. Fire can be both good and bad, sometimes at the same time. Fire can produce, and fire can destroy. Fire can light the way, and eat up the forests we need. Fire can take us to new places, and can let us destroy the new places we are taken to. Passions, too, are ambiguous. A love for God can make us bold, and can make us reckless, uncaring. Passion for the success of God's work can create both a Mother Theresa and a David Koresh. So: fire is passion, is powerful, changes things, creates and destroys, changes our perception, and is ambiguous.

Today, we look at the first text in the Bible. In the very first written scripture, we find the basics of human existence. In the beginning, God! All that is began with God, who made it out of his own imagination. But God is not presented here is someone who brought forth the final product all at once. God is presented as a loving craftsman, shaping and molding his creation into a shape and form that he pronounced good.

First, God created something to work with. The world, or read universe, was shapeless. It existed, but not in any particular form. God tells us in Genesis how he designed creation. The next part of that shaping was to create light! It is light that precedes all other forms. What an interesting concept from a culture that was not scientific. Modern scientists say that the universe began as energy, which light is. What an amazing coincidence, maybe!

And when God looked on this first day's work, he pronounced it Good! Where else in the Bible do we see God saying that something was good? The only other place I can think of is at the Baptism of Christ and at the Transfiguration. On both of those occasions, God spoke his approval of Jesus. Other than that, this is a unique occurrence.

So what does all this have to do with Pentecost? Well, again fire is the common denominator. During creation, God began with light, with energy, and changed perceptions. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came as fire and changed forever how believers think of themselves. At creation, something never before seen or thought of

was made. At Pentecost, the church began: a new and radically different grouping of those who respond to God's call. This church is not based on common ethnic identity, or even common philosophy or world view or culture. It is based on a living, loving relationship with Jesus Christ. We are not united by a common set of rules, but by a common savior and friend.

That was not the only thing new that Pentecost day. It was the birth of preaching, of proclaiming that faith in Jesus and acceptance of his salvation was the path to God. The Jews of old had prophets who called the people to repentance and a return to the law they had been given. This was something new: this was a call to belief in a person, and it would be issued to all, not just Jews or those who wanted to become Jews. This was new!

And this was good! In the Genesis story, God himself proclaims that this first stage of creation was good. In the Pentecost story, we are told that some 5,000 people joined the church on that first Sunday of a new era. That also was good. Creation is God's work, and it is good! It is to be rejoiced in and enjoyed and praised.

So what are we creating? Where are we making something new? Well, you say, that is God's work, not mine. But Paul says that God has chosen to use us to do his work in this world. We are God's workers, building his kingdom to his design. We may not be the architects, but we are surely the workmen. We are the ones called to carry out the blueprints that God has provided. At least we can put our energy, our fire, into doing the things that we know to do. Those things include, in Jesus words', feeding the hungry, visiting those in prison, clothing the naked, comforting the mourners, giving the thirsty something to drink. These things we all can, and should, do; these things should be a part of our legacy.

Genesis later tells us that God made us in his image. The word actually means 'shadow' as much as image. It has the connotation that we move and act as he moves and acts through us, like a shadow moves and acts in response to a person's movement and actions. This certainly fits with the idea of Pentecost, where the Divine Spirit filled the believers, and they acted as they were led. But we are more than just blind followers of a static set of divine plans. We are called to be more than just obedient servants, never thinking, only doing. We are challenged to create, as God did. This

is an ability we share with God, but with no other creatures.

Acting in the power of the Holy Spirit, we can create new things. On Pentecost, the church was created. On Pentecost, people first spoke in tongues. And on Pentecost, Peter delivered the first sermon. As the church continued, other new rituals and events were created. Communion, commanded by Jesus, was shaped by the emerging Christians as a part of routine worship. Even worship itself was changed, becoming a first-day-of-the-week event, rather than a Sabbath event. And worship moved out of the temple into houses, by necessity. Martyrs and missionaries would become a part of the early church and be something different from what had happened before.

So what do you create? What do you make that is new and special and unique? Like me, you may stand in awe of people like Martha who can design and make banners and mosaics and paintings. You may despair of ever being an artist like Lorraine, who can fill a church with music that is beautiful and inspiring. But Paul says in his letters to the Corinthians that we all have gifts, gifts from the Holy Spirit. And with those gifts we can make something new, something better. We are to use those gifts to build up the community of believers.

Well, you say, is it me that is creating, or is it God creating through me. And I answer yes! It is both. God does not just want our unthinking, un-imaginative response. God wants everything that we are: heart and soul and spirit and mind and imagination, all of it.

So again I ask, what are you creating? Are you making a better church, a better community, a better family? Are you working to build up your friends in Christ? Are you trying to create a new and more Christ-like world? Or are you just following a set of rules, a routine that is just a set of habits, but no longer energizing for you or for anyone else around you. Where is the fire of your creation?