

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes  
for Sunday, 19 February

## Children's Talk: Not Consumed

Our topic today is a fire that was seen by a man named Moses. It was a special fire, a fire from the Lord. Before we get to that fire I want to think about normal fire. When something burns, what happens to that thing? It is burned up and turns to ash, right? If I burn these pine needles, they catch, burn, and then go away. A candle burns down to nothing, even a large log in a fire will burn away eventually. That's what made the fire that Moses saw amazing: it burned in a bush, but the bush did not burn away:

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of Jehovah appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn." So when Jehovah saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!"  
And he said, "Here I am."  
(Exodus 3:1-4)

The bush was on fire, but it was not consumed or destroyed by the fire. That is because the Lord was in the fire, and He was calling Moses to a great purpose.

Love is a lot like fire: and like fire, it seems as if loving other people can get very tiring. It burns us out. It eventually runs out and we have no more to give. Have you ever started out on a project of making something for your mom, or helping out around the house, and at first had so much energy? But as time went on the energy faded and you began to get frustrated and annoyed? That's like a fire that burns out.

But love from the Lord is not like that: the Lord's love never burns out. On the one hand, that means the Lord never tires of loving you. He never gets so annoyed or frustrated that He gives up. His love just keeps coming, no matter what. On the other hand, it means we can have a love just like that if we look for it from the Lord.

He can inspire us with a love that doesn't tire us out but instead lifts us up and makes us feel even more excited about being kind and helpful.

We all will sometimes feel tired, and when we do we might need to rest. But that is only temporary. We can continue to love the Lord and love our neighbours to eternity, and never get bored of it or have to stop. The fire of the Lord's love only grows and burns brighter. When we feel like giving up and becoming lazy about loving other people, we can remember that love, and ask the Lord for more, and He will give it to us from his never-ending supply.

# The Burning Bush

A sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn  
19 February, 2023

With all the distractions of life, the many mundane activities to attend to, the daily grind that never seems to end, God can get lost in the shuffle. Some have tried to transcend all worldly concerns in order to focus entirely on God, but for many of us that is not an option. The world is too present in our lives. Thankfully the Lord does not only exist on high; He is present in the worldly stuff of life, and through repentance everyone is able to meet Him even among the day-to-day concerns.

The story begins with Moses leading his father-in-law's flock of sheep out to the far side of the desert, arriving at last at Horeb, the mountain of God.

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. (Exodus 3:1)

On the one hand this is the most unremarkable part of the whole story: a shepherd travelling through deserts is the most normal thing ever to find in the Word. And yet in this simple phrase is contained almost the whole of spiritual life: a journey of protecting and guiding what is good, as best as possible staying on the straight and narrow through the wilderness of life, beset by challenges and hardships; and then, at last, on the far side coming to the mountain of God; coming at last to the hoped for conclusion, when evil is banished and love takes firm root in our hearts; "Weeping may endure for a night; but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). We navigate to the far back side of the wilderness of evil, and find at last the mountain of God's love.

But that journey is not the subject today. Instead our focus turns to our companion on that journey, who is present at every twist and turn, and yet who seems frustratingly absent: the Lord Himself. Much of the daily grind of life feels as if we are doing our own work, under our own initiative and by means of our own power.

There are times of course when we are forced to confront the presence of God. When we face unimaginable tragedy, or are lifted by overwhelming joy, we turn to God and may feel His presence almost as if it were tangible. But when you are late for work because you stopped for a coffee and have hit traffic on a Wednesday morning, and are losing your patience to say the least, God might not seem so present. Nor might He seem so present even on a nice sunny Saturday enjoying a beer by the pool.

So how do we find God in the mundane? Or how do we rise above the ordinary to find that transcendent? In the story of Moses that we are looking at we find an illustration of how the Lord Himself is present in even the most mundane activities, and how, if we are willing, we might meet Him even there. It is presented in the imagery of a burning bush:

And the Angel of Jehovah appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn." (Exodus 3:2-3)

A bramble bush is not by any means the grandest of plants. We might expect the Angel of the Lord to have appeared in a mighty oak, or a graceful willow; but no, he appeared in a bramble bush, out beyond the wilderness, on a deserted mountainside.

I think all of us could relate to a certain disappointment in finding the Lord in such a lowly place. We look for God in many other places. Think of the Eastern idea of meditating on a mountain for years, seeking that one transcendent encounter with the Divine. We don't literally practice that kind of activity much in the West, but we do have a desire for something similar. We want an encounter with the Divine that is so profound, so deep, that there is no denying it, such that all doubt and questioning and fear is blown away and reduced to nothing. I was recently talking to someone

about a “calling.” People talk about their calling in life as if there is a purpose for which they were born, a unique and influential purpose, and the point of life is to tap into that single and unique calling, and pursue it. Now I should note that I have nothing against the idea of a calling; I believe we all have a unique purpose; but we can become so attached to this idea of a grandiose calling that we miss the possibility that maybe our calling is to be kind; to do what is right in the little things; to try our best to follow the Lord day in and day out, and not get side-tracked by the allure of chasing a calling.

There is a similar experience that we have when we turn to the Lord’s Word. I’m sure many of us have turned to the Lord’s Word looking for one of those profound moments, and having read a chapter or too, giving up. Even the Lord’s Word can appear basic and mundane. But this is where we come back to that lowly bramble bush. The Teachings of the New Church explain that the bramble bush represent mere information or knowledge, especially information from the Word. It is into this basic container that the Lord pours His love so that we can receive it.

That’s the meaning of the fire burning in the bush but not consuming it. The most ardent love imaginable, beyond the wildest dreams of the most enlightened mystic, burns within the basic teachings of the Lord’s Word. In its pure form this love is so great that it would overwhelmed completely anyone who fully viewed it. The Teachings of the New Church say that,

The Divine Itself is pure love, and pure love is like a fire which is more ardent than the fire of the sun of this world; and therefore if the Divine love in its purity were to flow into any angel, spirit, or man, he would utterly perish.  
(*Secrets of Heaven* §6849)

And so the Lord, more often than not, does *not* come to us in such a pure form. Instead, like the Lord to Moses, His Divine Love calls out to us in the most mundane ways possible; and yet even in finding a presence in these natural, external,

mundane things, the divine love is not reduced one iota. It burns, and the container is neither consumed nor does the flame go out. If we look to the Lord's Word we find information about how to live a basically good, decent, life. And within that information is instructions on how to find the very purpose of our lives and the key to love for others.

We see an extension of this presence of Divine Love in the mundane in our daily experiences. When the line is long at the food store, and the cashier fumbles with your cash, and is going slowly, yet you refrain from letting irritation get the better of you, Divine Love is present. When your child is nervous about going to school, and in a quiet moment you give their hand a comforting squeeze, Divine Love is present. When you roll out of bed in the morning, get ready for the day, and go into work prepared to do your job faithfully, Divine Love is present. The purpose of most of our lives is to go through our regular days, simply doing what is right and refraining from what is wrong in a million tiny ways that go mostly unnoticed by anyone. Your purpose may not be to save the world; your purpose may be to show kindness to a stranger; that is not in any way to downplay your purpose; quite the opposite in fact: it is to uplift the small acts of kindness that we perform daily; after all, those acts taken together can indeed save the world.

That the Lord can be present, with the fullness of His love, in the here and now, does not mean that we have no part to play in welcoming His presence. It is not just a matter of seeing that God is here, but doing our part to bring Him closer. We see this represented in the fact that Moses had to remove his shoes before approaching the burning bush:

So when Jehovah saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!"  
And he said, "Here I am."

Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." (Exodus 3:4-5)

Shoes are the lowest part of our clothing, in constant contact with the filth of the ground. They represent the parts of our external lives that are so superficial and natural that they push the Lord away. We need to remove these inclinations so that God can be present in our daily lives. As we have firmly established it is not about getting rid of everything that is worldly. It is only a matter of removing those things that oppose the Lord. So for example, enjoying good food does not push the Lord away; food is merely natural, and the Lord can be eminently present in a shared meal. But a hunger for selfishness, craving after only physical pleasure to the detriment of anything else, is not so neutral. It is a natural tendency that blocks the Lord.

The simple act of living a good life, and shunning evils as and when they come up, is not by any means a merely adequate life; it is the life that leads to heaven. The Teachings of the New Church make it plain that living a life that leads to heaven is not nearly so difficult as many people think it is. It does not require renunciation of worldly things or over-the-top shows of extravagant charity or self-sacrifice. Instead, we read,

Since a person can live outwardly as others do, can grow rich, keep a plentiful table, dwell in an elegant house and wear fine clothing according to his condition and function, can enjoy delights and gratifications, and engage in worldly affairs for the sake of his occupation and business and for the life both of the mind and body, provided he inwardly acknowledges the Divine and wishes well to the neighbour, it is evident that to enter upon the way to heaven is not so difficult as many believe. The sole difficulty lies in being able to resist the love of self and the world, and to prevent their becoming dominant; for this is the source of all evils. That this is not so difficult as is believed is meant by these words of the Lord:

Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls; for My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matt. 11:29, 30).

The Lord's yoke is easy and His burden light because a man is led by the Lord and not by self just to the extent that he resists the evils that flow forth



from love of self and of the world; and because the Lord then resists these evils in man and removes them. (*Heaven and Hell* 359)

God is not just present in the transcendent moments of life; He is present in the mundane, ever working to save us and lift us up. If we are willing, we will be able to see Him there, and join our meagre efforts to His, and find that His Divine Love is accessible at all times, in all things, a burning fire that is never quenched.