**“Burn, baby, burn”**

**A Sermon for the Great Vigil of Easter, 2016**

**Written by the Rev. Rachel Wildman**

*O God, Grant that in this Paschal feast, we may so burn with heavenly desires, that with pure minds we may attain to the festival of everlasting light, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

I love fire. I hate to light matches—did not actually light a match until I was in my late 20’s—but I LOVE fire. In any home where there is a fire in the fireplace, I am there…anytime there is a candle burning during a time of meditation, my eyes are open and on that flame. My absolute favorite disco song—Yep--Disco Inferno…Burn, baby burn! So, this prayer Chris said outside tonight on our behalf, that we might burn with heavenly desires, really caught my attention.

I had forgotten what actually happens when things burn, so I did a bit of a google search this week and was reminded that when something burns, it’s own molecules break apart, and *re*-combine with oxygen.[[1]](#footnote-1) ,[[2]](#footnote-2) As they recombine, they release energy, typically in the form of light and heat—fire.

Is this not the PERFECT metaphor for this most Holy night?? This moment, right now, we sit in the darkness of Jesus’ death, and our own mortality, yet can see the light of Jesus’ resurrection, and our own, just appearing on the horizon—it is literally moments away. At this in-between moment, right now…we pray that we might burn—that the molecules of our humanity, and all its finitude, might break apart, and *re-*combine with the everlasting wisdom, empowerment, and life of God in a release of such energized *new* *life* that fire bursts forth.

We pray for the re-combination of human and Divine desires and experiences into one….God living eternally in us, through us, and with us. God empowering us, through Christ as Christ’s own body, to build Heaven on earth. This prayer for fire—for re-combination between our humanity and God’s divinity is a prayer for our own, personal, participation in the very fulfillment of the incarnation, itself!

PAUSE

There are infinite ways in which our humanity and God’s divinity might be recombined. So, on this night, in 2016, in the grief of yet more suicide bombings, in the fear of yet more polarizing political rhetoric, in the pain of yet more racial injustice, in the helplessness of yet more poverty, what Divine desires do we pray re-combine with our own?

Our Old Testament readings tonight tell us of a number of God’s desires…We have just heard of God’s saving deeds through the stories of creation, of Moses parting the Red Sea, and of Ezekiel breathing life into dry bones. In these stories, God’s desires are many—in the Creation story, we heard that God desires to create and then to rest. In the parting of the Red Sea, we heard that God desires to fight for the oppressed, and to gain Glory—respect. In the coming to life of the dry bones, we heard that God desires to lead, to breathe new life into, to bring the oppressed up, and to make God’s people know that God does, indeed, speak and act.

God wants to create, rest, fight, lead, breathe new life, liberate, and make us know that God *does* speak and act.

We have many of these same desires.

Many of us desire to create—to create new life, in the form of a child, to create new programming at work, to create a piece of art.

*All* of us, I imagine, desire to rest—to rest from demanding work environments, to rest from arguing children, to rest from aging bodies that no longer work the way they used to.

We desire new life—new friendships, a renewed sense of purpose to our work or our retirement, newfound joy and hope.

We desire liberation—from a struggling marriage, from an addiction, from depression or anxiety, from unemployment.

We desire the certain knowledge that God still speaks and acts—even for us—in the mundane of our lives, in ways we can see with absolute clarity.

As we sit in the darkness and await the glorious divine re-combination of this night, we pray that these desires of ours are broken open and re--combined with God’s own desires for these same things…Such that we desire these things not just for ourselves and those we know and love already, but by our witnessing of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, we come to desire these things for the whole world.

We pray that we might so burn this night that we no longer desire to create just for ourselves, but for others—those known to us and not yet known to us--, that we rest not just for ourselves, but to replenish our energy to give to others—those known to us to and not yet known to us--, that we fight not just for ourselves, but for others—those known to us and not yet known to us--that we breathe newness not just into our own lives, but into other’s lives, that we know that God still speaks and acts not just for our own empowerment, but so that all those others needing liberation will be empowered by knowing that God is still speaking and still acting for them, too—for the whole world.

PAUSE

In this very moment, we are hovering in a wonderfully pregnant middle space—

* Liturgically, we are hovering between light and dark
* Scripturally, we are hovering between the Old Testament and the New Testament
* Metaphorically, or perhaps not so metaphorically, between death, and life anew
* Literally, between Good Friday and Easter
* Spiritually, between God from outside, and we as God’s own body—God in us, and through us, and *by us*.

This hovering creates the perfect conditions for fire—the molecules on each side are drawing closer…Our desires will again, be re-combined with God’s so that they are given the Divine empowerment they need for us to bring Heaven to earth—to continue building God’s Kingdom of radical love and forgiveness from the glimpses of it we now see, to it as the dominating landscape of our world. We will, again, experience the very fulfillment of the incarnation—God not just incarnate as the single person of Jesus, but incarnate in each of us as the massive, loving, courageous, liberating Body of Christ. We will, as Chris prayed on our behalf, attain to the festival of everlasting light!!

This cosmic re-combination is just about to happen, and the light from the fire that will result is about to pour forth. Let us sing with abandon, with great joy, with burning excitement of our newly created selves, and our newly created world! Burn, baby, Burn! AMEN.

1. <http://www.qrg.northwestern.edu/projects/vss/docs/propulsion/2-how-do-things-burn.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://science.howstuffworks.com/environmental/earth/geophysics/fire1.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)