

2019 08 18 – Adding Wisdom

Luke 12:49-56

How many of you went to see Garth Brooks last weekend in Regina? Were you there on Saturday night when he brought Camille Baragar up on stage? I wasn't there but I read about it on CBC online this week. Camille is an 11 year-old girl from Southey SK and at the concert Camille held up a sign with the words, "Bullied but not broken. Please play Standing Outside the Fire." Garth noticed the sign and spoke directly to her and then he sang the song that she requested.

This is how the song began:

We call them cool
Those hearts who had no scars to show
The ones that never do let go
And risk the tables bein' turned

We call them fools
Who have to dance within the flame
Who chance the sorrow and the shame
That always comes with getting burned

But you've got to be tough when consumed by desire
'Cause it's not enough just to stand outside the fire
<https://genius.com/Garth-brooks-standing-outside-the-fire-lyrics>

Garth's song is telling us that we need to be willing to be burned by the fire in order to live life to the fullest. Jesus is saying basically the same thing in today's scripture. He says, "I've come to light a fire on this earth. How I wish the blaze were ignited already!" Jesus and Garth are both describing the same kind of fire. This fire is, of course, the fire of love, the blazing fire of the Spirit of Love.

Standing in the fire of love is never easy. Whenever we are vulnerable enough to give our heart to someone then we also risk being burned or betrayed. Love is not easy but the possibility of receiving love in return is worth the risk. As Garth sang, "It's not enough to stand outside the fire."

Jesus warns us that the fire he is talking about could also bring division in people's lives. He says, "Do you think I'm here to bring peace on earth? I tell you, the opposite is true: I've come to bring division." Jesus knows that his blazing love will not be popular. Jesus knows that the kind of love he is talking about will force people to leave their old thinking and even their old lives behind. Jesus is talking about a love that extends beyond gender, race, ethnicity, class or creed. Jesus is talking about radical love: love of God, love of neighbour and love of self.

Can you think of times in your life when you have chosen love over peace, when you have made a choice that you thought was right even though others disagreed? I remember following my heart, falling in love with a woman and then having to tell my family. It was one of the scariest things I have ever done. I remember one of my brothers deciding to take up a trade instead of going to university thus following a different path than our parents had chosen for him. I remember leaving my job at IBM and following my heart into ministry despite lots of questioning looks from my colleagues. What times of discernment do you remember? When have you jumped into the fire despite the possibility of being burned?

How do we know that we are making the right decision, how do we know when to jump into the fire? Jesus said, “If you have got the ability to read the sky and know when the rain is coming, if you’ve got technology that can predict tomorrow’s temperature, why can’t you understand what is going on right now? Why can’t you interpret your own time, your own feelings, your own truth?” Well, it’s not always easy is it?

The ability to discern what is right in the moment, the ability to know when to jump into the fire that is called wisdom. And, as Aristotle says, “knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.” Knowing yourself means knowing your own truth. And in order to know ourselves we have to be willing to listen to what our bodies, our hearts and our souls are saying.

One way to listen to ourselves is through contemplation. Parker Palmer, in his book *On the Brink of Everything*, writes “Contemplation is any way one has of penetrating illusion and touching reality” (pg. 57) Contemplation can take many forms. Some of us meditate in silence, some of us pray, some us go for walks in nature, some of us run, some of us discern with friends. Good decisions, wise decisions, hard decisions, decisions that require us to jump into the fire usually also require contemplation. It takes time to rid ourselves of all the illusions in our lives so that we can find our truth, our reality.

This week on CBC radio, I listened with fascination to Paul Kennedy ‘s *Ideas*. Kennedy was talking about Emma Goldman, a woman who was born in the second half of the 19th century. When she was a teenager her father decided

that Jewish girls only needed to know how to cook and have children so she wasn't allowed to go to school. But Emma had other ideas and so, at the age of 16, she defied her father's wishes and travelled on her own from Lithuania to the United States. Emma had hopes of being part of the great democratic project. All her life Emma followed her own heart and fought for freedom wherever she was. I'm not sure that I agree entirely with her philosophy of life but I admire her ability to know her own truth and make decisions and to jump into the fire with wisdom and courage. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/anarchist-emma-goldman-picked-as-paul-kennedy-s-favourite-ideas-subject-1.5192199>

When Garth Brooks noticed Camille Baragar's sign last Saturday night he shared some of his own wisdom. He told her he was a father of three girls just like her. He told Camille that bullies are people who are scared and that it takes more strength to love someone than to hate them. Basically he was telling her that she needed to jump into the fire by seeing those bullies for who they really are and loving them even in their weakness. May we all have the wisdom and the courage to follow our hearts into the fire of God's love.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/garth-brooks-bullying-camille-baragar-1.5245059>

I want to end today with an email that Steve Garnass-Holmes, a United Methodist minister in the United States., wrote in response to today's scripture reading:

Dearly Beloved,

Grace and Peace to you.

“Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?
No, I tell you, but rather division!”
—Luke 12.51

Not us-versus-them. Not good people on one side
and everybody else on the other. Not you against neighbors.

But you, distinct from what others want of you.
You, not what will please them.

The real you, true and unmodified,
standing for what you know and care for,

regardless of how others balk and resist and criticize
and cajole and manipulate and persecute and crucify.

Beware: those whose hearts are unwhole
will try to draw you in to complete them;

but you cannot be them for them. This is the great division.
You must be yourself, and let their incompleteness go,

without ceasing to love them. Let them press against you
even as you stand for them.

Jesus prays for strength for you to stand as self,
to stand without pleasing, without apologizing.

Stand with hope and trust, though you be alone—
for, standing alone, you find your true companions,

bound not by opinion but by the Whole, What Is,
given, not made, the Body of Christ.

Deep Blessings,
Pastor Steve

Steve Garnaas-Holmes
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