**Introduction**

Water and fire. Those were kinda the themes of the real week. Not enough water, too much fire.

Those just happen to be the themes of the texts this week as well. You’ve heard me say before the lectionary is scare quotes “relevant” more often than is deserves to be. More mystical traditions attempt to explain things this way. That everything moves at the impulse of the love of God. The Eastern Orthodox call it energy and emanation. The Kabbalistic Jews talk in a similar way with everything for the year being sealed from God at the New Year. So of course the scare quotes “real world” is actually secondary. It moves in the patterns that the sacred text reveals.

The west has always been a little less mystical and a little more philosophical. Things on earth receive their form, their pattern, from things in heaven – matter conforms to spirit.

**Text**

“I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The wheat he will gather, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

That’s the core statement of our gospel reading. The water and the fire are contrasted with each other. The water is the precursor, or the necessary means of the Holy Spirit. The fire is the revelation. It refines, or it burns up.

**Christology**

We can talk about that revelation is a couple of ways. There is the revelation of Jesus Christ. “A voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” The entire life of Jesus Christ is one of revelation. Revelation of the grace and truth of God. Revelation of the Love of God the Father, our creator. Revelation of how we are to walk with God. Revelation of what this life is about and what lies beyond. The revelation of Jesus Christ is a fire to burns through the world. When Jesus talked about not bringing peace but a sword. Or when he said things like those who confess me before men, I will confess before my Father in heaven. This is the fire. God has bared his holy arm before the nations. And the proclamation of Jesus Christ is the fire.

The second way we can talk that revelation is what that fire does to us. Our entire lives are the revelation of where our hearts are at. Are we wheat to be gathered, or chaff to be burned? Is there any precious metal that will survive the refining, or are we to be completely consumed?

We don’t always know it. Satan does a good job of hiding it. But the world is full of too much fire. Like the son of man who brought his son to Jesus at the bottom of the mount of Transfiguration, we are constantly falling into the fire. The truth of God is placed before our hearts and in our ears. The temptation or day of trial comes swiftly. And if can’t be otherwise. If people were silent, the stones would cry out. The temptations must come, but woe to the one through whom they come. Spiritually, the whole world is ablaze. Occasionally not even Satan can hide the reality. Occasionally the real world testifies to the spiritual reality. Everything is being revealed in time. And it is either gathered, or consumed.

But we have been given water. Christ had no need of a baptism. He himself is the living water. As he told the Samaritan woman at the well, as they are bantering about a drink. “If you know who had asked, you would have asked me for the living water, and I would have given it.” The Holy Spirit descended upon him like the dove. All the sinners gathered for that baptism of repentance didn’t receive that anointing. But Jesus did. Jesus stood under those waters with us. And as Luther’s Baptismal prayer reminds us, by standing in those waters, “He sanctified and instituted all waters to be a blessed flood and a lavish washing away of sin.” As Peter would say, “baptism now saves you.” As Paul would write, “all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death…in order that just as Christ was raised from dead…we too might walk in newness of life.”

And as the Nicene creed would say, the Spirit proceeds form the Father and the Son. That Spirit that anointed Christ in his baptism, is given to us when we receive his baptism. That Spirit is the promised living water that wells up to eternal life. He took our baptism of repentance. And he carried all our sins, the sins of all mankind, to the cross. And from his side came the water. A blessed flood.

We have been given water. And unlike our sad state where the reservoirs were empty. Were never even filled. We have an eternal supply. More than enough water. “When you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” Christ is with you, fear not. We shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

**Moral**

When we see for a moment our mortal state. Whether it be through disaster or tragedy or contemplation or proclamation of any of the ways that God draws near to us and hold back the veil for a moment. When we see the flames.

We have a choice. We can lament the loss. Like lots wife turn and weep over Sodom. Like the merchants in Revelation crying over the destruction of Babylon. We can try and hold onto this life. And if we desire to hold onto this life we will lose it. Or we can live by the waters of life. The waters that Moses has come form the Rock in the desert. A Rock that followed Israel all their journey. We can rejoice that God has made us an Ark and we have been saved by the flood. That we have been place in that Ark of the church through those baptismal waters.

Do we desire to hold onto the sin, to the life of the world? Or are we dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ?

**Eschatological**

The fires reveal everything. In this life we all lay a foundation. We all build a house. And the fires will reveal what we have built. That is how Paul describes this life. Have we build with gold or silver or with straw. The day will reveal it.

That day is life a fire. Be sure you have the living water.