

DEAR READER

A Fire Burning Round the World

T ONLY TAKES A SPARK to get a fire going.” Those words became all too real for me a number of years ago when I was clearing a small wooded area next to our home. I had spent hours raking and piling leaves, pine needles, and branches. My work was nearly finished. All that remained was to burn the leaves.

Little did I know that the combination of the dry brush and the fall breeze would turn my small fire into a blazing inferno that nearly raged beyond my control as the flames reached the lower branches of surrounding trees. Thankfully there was a garden hose nearby and, after a few tense moments, the fire was under control and danger was averted.

Later, as I reflected on the events of that afternoon, I thought about Pentecost. As the disciples gathered in prayer, waiting and wondering how and when God would reveal himself to a post-ascension community of believers, the room was suddenly filled with the sound of a rushing wind and “tongues of fire” appeared above each of them. Fire and wind—a powerful combination. What started that day as small flames of fire spread from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and to the far edges of the world.

Fanned by the wind of the Holy Spirit, the message of grace burned across a tinderbox world dried by death and sin. The flames could not be controlled as they spread further and faster, bringing hope to despairing people.

Throughout history, that fire has continued to burn. Even though at times it seemed that the fire had all but died,

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God blew across the few glowing embers and raised up leaders such as Luther and Calvin to rekindle his fire of salvation.

Like all fires, the fire of salvation expands where there is fresh fuel—along the edges. I recently visited with church leaders who tend the fire on the edges. These men and women find themselves doing ministry in places where the only thing that is certain is uncertainty; where ministry is messy, chaos is the norm, and the work of God is constantly surprising. In these ministries the flames of Pentecost spread and burn with passion and power.

Jesus described the spread of the gospel burning from the center (Jerusalem) out to the edges of the world. It has been more than 2,000 years since the Great Commission was first announced to the disciples, and still the fires of grace continue to burn.

We find hotspots of this fire around the world. In North America, the fire burns where local congregations engage their neighbors and communities with the transformational power of the gospel. In China, it burns in house churches that gather for study and prayer. In Africa, it burns in the face of radical Muslim fundamentalism.

The fire of Pentecost and the message of hope continue to transform lives and communities around the world. I invite you to read the stories of how the Christian Reformed Church is doing its part. Celebrate God’s power and join the work of God’s consuming fire as it spreads around the world. It only takes a spark!

Though the fire of God can be an intimidating and awesome thing, we are called to fan the flames and spread the Word. Let’s join together in the transformation work that began at Pentecost and will continue until Christ returns to claim his church.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28-29). ■



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