

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who will set you on fire, Jesus Christ Our Lord, amen.

Do you remember your first love? Mine was a girl who lived down the street. I was only 5 years old. I can't remember her first name, but her last name was Minick and she was our pastor's daughter. I don't remember saying this, but I'm told I asked her to marry me... We moved away and I never saw her again, but I remember having that first love.

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, our real first love is for Jesus Christ. He is the one for whom our heart longs. Jesus is the one for whom we are restless and we won't find rest or peace until we rest in Him. John the Baptizer proclaims "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Friends, are you on fire with love for the Lord? If not, then make a change in your life and return to your first true love. It's hard for a Pastor to preach about repentance or change because what people hear is that they aren't being good enough or not doing enough good to be acceptable to God. The trouble is that when the Pastor preaches about repentance and changing behavior, it's literally like preaching to the choir. The people in the Church are one fire with the Holy Spirit and do have the love of Jesus kindled in their hearts. The people

who can benefit the most from a message of repentance are the ones not at
Worship on any given Sunday. Well, maybe...

I'm going to start out with a story I read this week. It's a story about a small Church that was losing members. Not because of anything that was going south. There wasn't any great conflict. The people just sort of drifted away and lost their passion for both God and their Church family. Then one day the church building caught fire and was engulfed in flames. A crowd gathered as the firefighters tried to fight the blaze. The Pastor walked among the crowd and saw several people that hadn't come to worship in years watching as the church burned. The Pastor asked one man who was there watching why he hadn't seen him at worship in so long and why he was there now. The man replied he hadn't seen the Church on fire for many years...

There's a certain point when a building catches fire when the temperature reaches a critical point, it's called the flash point. When the flash point is reached suddenly everything in the room that can burn, will burn. When it comes to the Church, sometimes fire can be a good thing. The writer of the book of Hebrews says, "Our God is a consuming fire." Our God is the kind of fire that changes us. God refines us. God purges us. In a house fire, at first the fire grasps for things that can burn. Then most of the house and the stuff in it becomes the fuel and begins to catch fire too. There comes a point where the temperature in the house

reaches a certain point and as it reaches the flash point, something critical is about to happen...

There's a story about a French writer, artist, and film director by the name of Jean Cocteau who was asked what was the one thing he would take if his house was on fire. His answer was that he would take the fire... That may seem like a frivolous response, but for a true artist, he knew the value of taking his fire, his passion with him. All the stuff in the house could be replaced, but if we lose our passion, the fire in our guts, then we might as well be dead ourselves... Your fire, the fire in your belly is the catalyst that can set this congregation on fire with the love of Jesus Christ. The fire of our passion for Jesus Christ is directly proportionate to our level of commitment to Jesus Christ. It's the fire of passion that changes a life and makes a new creature out of the old sinful Adam or Eve in every one of us. It's that fire of passion that purges the sin from within and makes saints out of the most vile sinner among us. That fire, that passion brings about a complete and thorough cleansing. As Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church, "You are a new creation in Christ."

Here's the thing... God does not and will not force Himself on anyone. The only one who can drown out the spiritual fire within you, is you. I'm not talking about your salvation, I'm talking about how you live your life once you realize you are already saved by the blood of your savior Jesus Christ. Do you want to live a

watered down Gospel? Or, would you like your heart to be set aflame with passion for your first true love? Actually, it's a package deal. You can't have the Holy Spirit without the fire. Remember what it says in Hebrews? Our God is a ... consuming fire... How can we kindle the fire that's already in us? Is there anything we can do to get that passion back both as individuals and as a congregation? Fortunately, the answer is yes to both. Perhaps the biggest display of the fire of the Holy Spirit took place on the Day of Pentecost. Actual tongues of fire landed on every person's head. There were 120 people gathered together that day. They were all different people. They were from different countries. They spoke different languages. They had different perspectives on life and were probably from different political parties... There was one thing they all had in common. They were all expecting something great to happen. They were all expecting the Holy Spirit to come. They didn't know what that meant or how the Holy Spirit would come, but they expected something. It's not your preacher, even preaching at my best that will set you afire. It's not Roxanne's or Darrell's great musical talent that will get your blood boiling or set this house on fire. It can only happen when God's people, that's you, begin to expect it to happen. That's when your passion begins to grow. When you expect the Holy Spirit to be present in your Bible Study the sparks begin to fly. When you expect to encounter the living God in your Worship and praise, God's Spirit shows up and the fire grows hotter

and hotter. Until something critical is about to happen... Until a flash point is reached.

Maybe your passion for God and your neighbor has been suppressed by the junk that happens in this world. Maybe you've become jaded because there's so much need and you feel you can't really make much of a difference. If John the Baptizer were here today, he would call us to remember our first love. I'm not talking about the little girl, pastor's daughter, down the street. I'm talking about the one who holds your heart in the palm of his hand, Jesus Christ our Lord.

My prayer for your life and mine is to let the fire of God's love grow in you. May God's Holy Fire fill you with passion for his Kingdom. Remember your first love and let God's holy Fire permeate your spirit. May you reach a flash point where your life is out of control and on fire for God so other people can look at you and see God's love burning inside, changing you and changing your world, amen.