

"Going Through the Fire"

(Your Pain Is Understood)

28.Feb.10

Hebrews 2:16-18
(*The Easter Experience*, Session 3)

This morning I want to talk about the idea of "going through the fire"...something we all find ourselves doing periodically. Most New Testament scholars agree that about one-third of the Gospels focus on the last times of Jesus' life, including His trial and torture.

A book I am currently reading suggests seven practices, or behaviors, which can enhance a business and the outlook of employees. As with many books targeted to business development (or at least in my reading experience), the crossover to faith development and church development are considerable. In this book the writers makes a profound statement, "We are defined by our decisions, not by our conditions." (*"Boom!" 7 Choices for Blowing the Doors Off Business-As-Usual*, Kevin & Jackie Freiberg.)

For example, if I decide to succumb to my pain and suffering, I have then *decided* to let it take hold of me and grow roots. It is not my *condition* of pain and suffering that determines my outlook. It is not my circumstance of pain. It is that I have *decided* to let it grow roots. This is what then defines my outlook; not that I *have* suffering, but that I *decided* to let it take hold.

We all have stories like the one I am about to share. When my son was in grade school, he needed foot surgery to correct the placement of a major muscle. The surgery was successful. But after a few hours his foot began to swell. It continued swelling, pushing against the hard cast from his toes nearly to his kneecap. The nurses could do nothing. Only the surgeon could cut off the cast. My son was in tremendous, unceasing pain. It took a while for the surgeon to arrive since he was not in the hospital. Eventually all was well. Crisis at an

end. But during it, my one wish was to have been able to take on my son's pain and suffering...to have "walked through that fire" for him.

How often do we find ourselves saying to someone "I know just how you feel." It is our honest attempt to help them know they are not alone; that someone is with them; that we relate to their pain and suffering. Though our intent is admirable, the result most often is not. Unless we ourselves have already "walked through the fire they are not walking through," and the person knows it (or we can tell them our story about it), we may do more harm than good by making that statement. Unless we have, there is no earthly way we can have any idea what the person we are trying to console and comfort is enduring. Our faith tells us

Jesus was wholly *divine* and wholly *human*. He was, and still is, of the "God-head." This means He was very human and experienced much of what you and I experience day to day. He thought about things we ourselves think about: friendships, enemies, supporters, adversaries, and how to live life. He thought about dangers and temptations. He laughed and cried. He travelled. He had an occupation (for at least part of his life.) He talked with folks—ate with them and spent time with them. He thought about religious authorities, always ready to offer a critique on those in political and social power. He observed the religious practices of His people and even went to synagogue.

Yes, Jesus was God incarnate. But my point is that He was also human and did things you and I do. His humanity allowed Him to hurt and to feel the pain...to respond to human trials as many a human might. His humanity allows us to know that when *we* experience "moments of fire" that He, too, *knows* what it is like.

Speaking of "fires," most of us remember the scripture passage, "...for He is like a refiners fire" (*Mal 3:2*). The prophet Malachi says that God is sending God's Messenger, and the day of His coming will be a day of fire and judgment, strength and power, because Messiah will go through a refiner's fire!

A Story—One day an artist in metals visited a silversmith to learn more about the process of refining silver. The silversmith explained it

in detail. Then the woman asked, "But do you have to watch and wait while the refining is being done?" "Oh yes," answered the silversmith. "I keep a constant eye on the furnace. If the refining time is exceeded by the slightest degree, the silver is impaired. So I watch and wait. I know when the refining is complete and the silver is pure when I can see myself reflected in it."

I believe God constantly watched and observed God's Son: every minute, every hour, every word, every deed, every miracle, and, yes, every spit in His face, every blow to His body, every humiliation thrown at Him, and every nail hammered through His flesh. I believe God observed all this, giving Christ God's strength. And when the "fire" was just right and just enough, and when God could finally see Himself reflected in the purity of His Son, *then* God knew the Son was *complete* and the *refining was done*.

In other words, through the fire God's Promise was fulfilled. Through the unimaginable pain and suffering the Promise blossomed. Therefore, you and I can know that when we ourselves "walk through any fire" our Lord *knows* what it is like.

A True Story—Charles Blondin was a Frenchman and the greatest tightrope walker of his time. On June 30, 1859, he strung a tightrope across Niagara Falls. Over 25,000 cheering people watched him as he made his way across the 1,100 feet of steel roping suspended above the Falls. With no safety net or safety harness, the slightest error could be fatal. As he approached the Canadian side of the Falls, the crowd went wild and started to chant, "Blondin! Blondin!" When the crowd finally stopped chanting, he yelled, "I am Blondin! Do you believe in me?" The crowd yelled back, "We believe! We believe!" Once the people settled down again, he yelled, "Do you believe that I can go back across the Falls carrying someone on my shoulders?" Another mighty roar erupted, "We believe! We believe!" Then, above the applause, Blondin yelled, "Who will be that person?" A strange silence fell over the crowd. Out of that silence walked one man. He crawled up the scaffold, climbed on Blondin's shoulders, and let himself be carried across the Falls. (*From "Boom! 7 Choices for Blowing the Doors Off Business-As-Usual," Kevin and Jackie Freiberg. 33-34.*)

Thousands yelled, "We believe!" But only one person acted on what he believed. Many of us here would probably think, "Who in his or her right mind would let some apparent idiot exhibitionist put their own life in jeopardy by agreeing to be carried across those Falls (carried "through the fire," if you will) on the back of someone, on a skinny tightrope?" The answer is, of course, the person who truly believes and is willing to act on that belief. In today's vernacular, it seems to me this is exactly what God, in Christ, means. "Trust me. Believe me. I *will* carry you across the pain, the anguish, the suffering. I *will* carry you through the fires in your life, to the other side. I *will* be your "refiner's fire," if you let Me."

There are at least seventeen passages in the New Testament where we read about the need for Jesus to endure pain and suffering; passages in His own words or in those of witnesses and followers. *

Surely it makes a huge difference for us to know that our Lord knows and understands because He Himself has been there! Surely it changes everything for you when you know Christ has been where you sometimes are—in the pain, in the suffering, in the "fire"—and He *knows* what it is like.

Here is an interesting fact I discovered in my readings this past week. There are two kinds of refining: (1) "smelting" or "calcining" refining involves a chemical *change* to the material being refined. (2) "non-metallurgical" refining involves **no** chemical change in the raw material. Its properties remain exactly the same. Meaning, that which is being refined remains fundamentally the same... only it becomes pure!

So the question each of would ask ourselves is, "How does what happened to Jesus *then* change things for you *now*?"

* (See Luke 9:21-22, 17:24-25, 22:15, 24:24-26, 24:45-46, 24:5-7; Matthew 16:21, 16:24, 17:12; Mark 8:31, 9:12, 9:30-32; Acts 3:17-20; Rom 8:17; John 12:25-26, 12:27, 16:20.)