Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“I have come to set the world on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing.”

Eph 3:14-21; Luke 12:49-53

Jesus speaks of a “baptism of fire” he must endure and how he wishes it were over. The phrase refers to a severe test that will show whether we have the courage and resources to succeed at some important task. The image brings to mind the foundry process of putting raw ore into the furnace to separate the metal from the dross, or putting pottery into a kiln, which tests whether the clay has air bubbles or is unevenly formed.

After months of preaching the coming of God’s reign, Jesus encounters mounting resistance to the grace of the moment that could have ushered in right relationships. He is determined to go to Jerusalem, the center of power, where the status quo is firmly entrenched and those who sit atop the establishment will reject him and his message.

The baptism of fire he will endure is his own death. He will fulfill the law and the prophets by sacrificing himself out of love. God will make of his offering the transforming pattern within history as leaven permeates flour to make it rise to new possibilities. His obedience will open the way to a new creation of human collaboration toward justice that will guide history to its divine destiny.

But this glorious future will be birthed in blood. The Gospel of peace and love will cause conflict and division between generations before it achieves its goal of unity in diversity, reconciliation and forgiveness within the human family. Jesus, whose own mother foresaw that he would be a sign of contradiction and a sword of sorrow, knew that suffering was the cost of transformation, and he longed for it to be over.

To be part of this future, each of us will face our own baptism of fire to separate truth from illusion, love from selfishness, God’s will from our own small plans. We do not know how

or when it will come, but it will come. Jesus shows us how to prepare for it, even long for it as the fulfillment of our lives. For we are bound for glory, and this is the only way forward.