

Sanctuaries on Fire
2 Chronicles 5:7, Acts 2:1-4
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[There is a large fire pit on the communion table with newspaper packed at the bottom, kindling, and small logs arranged ready to be lit. A box of matches sits next to it.]

Video Clip: "The Proposal" Movie Trailer (part 1)

[Margaret (Sandra Bullock) is a successful and shrewd business woman. Her competitive drive and cut-throat nature tends to drive people away, and so she lives a rather lonely life. She is also Canadian and her work visa is set to expire. In an act of desperation to save her job, she tells her boss that she is marrying her assistant, a young, handsome man with a large family in Alaska. In order to make the arrangement more believable, the two of them have to go to Alaska together and meet Ryan's family.]

Imagine getting married for the wrong reason—that's crazy. Because you had to or just because it was the law -- how crazy is that?

Imagine coming to worship for the wrong reason, just because you had to or thought it was the law or because you just wanted God stuff, you just wanted citizen ship in his country -- his kingdom. Imagine coming to church because you wanted God's stuff but not because you wanted God.

Can you imagine that?

Well, the truth is that we may not be able to imagine anything else. And that's okay for a time. I mean maybe God starts with our bad motives because they're the only motives we have.

Richard Rohr writes, "the great and merciful surprise is that we come to God not by doing it right but by doing it wrong."

Perhaps God begins with our bad motives because that's all that we have to offer. And when we finally do offer our bad motives, that is the very place we discover grace -- God's motive, steadfast love, *hesed* in Hebrew, covenant love.

Well, I never saw that movie, "The Proposal;" I didn't have to. Because once you see the trailer, you know what's going to happen. Sandra Bullock and Ryan Reynolds will go through the motions with bad motives -- greed, lust, and fear. But by going through the

motions, their bad motives will turn into good motives, fake love will turn into real love, and they'll actually fall in love – *hesed*, covenant love, steadfast love.

Social scientists refer to that as the principle of praxis. It's the idea that a person can know the truth through experience before they develop an intellectual belief system capable of understanding that truth.

So Sandra Bullock and Ryan Reynolds come to know something by going through the motions before they process that something with their brains. They come to know something with their hearts even before it makes any sense to their heads.

Blaise Pascal, the great philosopher and mathematician, said, "the heart has reasons that reason can never know." That is, the heart can know truth long before the head can explain it, like your heart can hear music long before your head can explain it, long before you can break the harmonies down to notes on the page. You know music is thoroughly logical. It's so logical we can't comprehend the logic. We just experience the logic and surrender to the logic. That is, you can't explain it; but you can dance to it when you surrender your heart to it. When your heart has reasons that your own reason does not know, we call that "falling in love".

Well, what if coming to Christ and growing in faith is less like solving a problem and more like falling in love?

And what if God set the world up this way on purpose because he's not a problem to be solved so much as a person to be loved?

If that's the case, and growing in faith is like falling in love, perhaps we should spend less time trying to argue ourselves into the kingdom of God and more time going on dates and waiting for the fire to fall. Kind of like this:

Video Clip: "The Proposal" Movie Trailer (part 2)

[While in Alaska, Ryan announces to his family that he is engaged to his boss. Upon his family's insistence, the two are forced to kiss each other. The first kiss is an dispassionate peck, and Ryan's grandmother demands he give her "a real kiss." They kiss again, but this time a little longer and softer—more real, catching them both off guard.]

Did you see that? Did you see the spark? The fake kiss turned into a real kiss.

My wife and daughters saw the movie and confirmed what I suspected. The fake proposal turned into a real proposal -- a covenant. The fake kiss turned into a real kiss for it burned with holy fire.

I wonder if fake worship can turn into real worship. *Poskuneo* is the Greek word for worship. It literally means "to kiss."

Well, if you've been married for a while, you know that the fire doesn't always fill the temple. I mean kisses can lose that passion "that they had at first." Your marriage covenant can feel like empty ritual devoid of the drama, romance, and passion that was "there at first."

Fulton Oursler wrote of that passion and something that supposedly happened one evening, years ago, at the café Royale in London. He writes this:

"An Army officer, just home from the wars, was dining alone. He noticed a beautiful woman seated alone at a nearby table. Not much more than forty, and beautiful. So feminine, so lovely, and entire in such discrete and exquisite style! Why would she be dining alone, He wondered.

"A moment later he noticed a man being seated at in another nearby table. This newcomer was tall was a tall well-knit man, with iron-gray hair. At once the man noticed the lonely Lady, so near yet so far. The look of admiration that flashed into his eyes was unmistakable. Quietly he called the waiter, ordered dinner, and then borrowed the waiter's pencil. Tearing a sheet of paper from a notebook, he wrote a message, folded it, and gave it to the waiter.

"The note was carried directly to the lady. She showed no visible sign of surprise, but with a sweet composure opened the note and read it. Then she folded it, thrust it to one side, and with merely a lift of her eyebrows, dismissed the waiter without any reply at all.

"The officer in the corner sighed, "good try," he thought. "What a shame."

"He watched the gentleman attack his dinner: roast beef, Yorkshire pudding. The lady meanwhile teased a lamb chop.

"After a time the tall gentleman paid his bill, stood up for a moment, let sad eyes linger on the unresponsive lady. Then he crossed over to her table.

"He bent low and whispered a few words. She stared at him blankly and made no sound. Even when the tall gentlemen pulled out a chair and sat down beside her, still she said not a word to him. The waiter brought the lady's bill. The gentleman reached for it, but with an imperious gesture, she stopped him. Leaving a pound note in the waiter's hand, she rose, and her visitor stood up with her. He followed her out into the spring night, and the observer in the corner never saw them again.

"He turned to the waiter, chuckling as he said, "this is a fine sort of thing. Flirtations going on in a fine restaurant like this." Then he noticed the waiter's face. The light in the man's eyes was like a prayer.

"Ah, sir," he said, "you do not understand! What you have seen tonight is a great love. This is the twenty-sixth time I have seen it. I saw it happen the very first time. That was how it began. 26 years ago, at those very same tables, I served them both that night, as I did tonight. With one glance they fell in love. I carried a note to her then, and when she didn't answer he got up and came over anyhow. He was that smitten with her. And God bless them both, he is still that smitten with her and she with him. Every year on the anniversary of their first meeting they come here and go through the whole drama again and may that love never, never, never die."

Two thousand years ago, we were dining alone, and God sent a note wrapped in flesh. He crossed over, and he paid our bill. He laid it on the table, and he said, "do this in remembrance of me." If we just do this, it's empty ritual. But if we do it remembering Him, the fire will fall.

"I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance," Jesus tells the church in Ephesus in the Revelation--His bride. "I know your works, but I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, and repent and do the things you did at first."

Rituals.

For 26 years, that couple in the restaurant had been "doing the things they did at first." And the sanctuary of their covenant was full of fire even more fire than at first.

Well, you know that we call our church the Sanctuary. It's a sanctuary of the covenant in which we celebrate a sacrament.

The very first sanctuary was a tent -- a tabernacle. God commanded Moses to build it about 3300 years ago. He gave him elaborate instructions regarding priests and rituals and sacrifices and offerings. On the day that Moses consecrated the tabernacle fire from the Lord fell on the sacrifices and consume them completely. At night the pillar of fire, that led the Israelites, would rest over at the sanctuary. A pillar of fire from heaven to earth and there every night Moses would meet with the Lord.

300 years later on Mount Moriah, King David offered sacrifices to the Lord, and fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices. On that spot, David decided to build the temple, the sanctuary of stone. But God tells David that it won't be David, but a son of David, that will build his sanctuary. And in 1 Chronicles 28, David charges Solomon with that task.

Two years ago, one night in August, I was reading 1 Chronicles in bed before I went to sleep, something I do once every 40 years or so. I read chapter 28 a couple of times and I remember thinking, "I bet there's something important here, but I'm so tired I'm just not

getting it." The next morning I received an e-mail from a young woman that I didn't know at the time but is now a friend here at the Sanctuary. Dannette wrote:

"Peter, I know you can get discouraged, and I know you are facing some matters with the heads of the church, but do not lose hope. 1 Chronicles 28:21: 'David also said to Solomon his son, "be strong and courageous: and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord [the sanctuary] is finished. The divisions of the priests and Levites are ready for all the work of the temple of God, and every willing man skilled in any craft will help you in all the work.'"

At the time I was amazed because I'd read that verse the night before but if I knew what was about to happen I would've been far more amazed. The "heads of the church" were upset with me because I was singing a song, and I wouldn't stop. I felt I couldn't stop singing, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever."

That last phrase is repeated 44 times in Scripture -- I think it's the most repeated phrase in all the Bible. According to Scripture: the proud come to an end, the evil of wicked come to an end, God's fury and God's wrath come to an end, the ages and even time come to an end, but the steadfast love of God -- that is God -- never ends for it is the end.

Jesus said, "I AM the beginning and the end." So death, darkness, evil, and Hades do not get the last word. Jesus is the last word, he's God's word. God's Word that crossed over, paid the bill -- all the bill -- he paid the bill and gave himself to us and for us--his bride.

Shortly after Dannette sent me those Bible verses a man in Australia sent me a vision. He saw a beautiful vase violently shattered, and with the broken pieces we formed a picture of Jesus -- a mosaic with broken pieces like puzzle pieces or living stones.

In 2 Chronicles, Solomon finishes building the stone temple and the priests bring the Ark of the Covenant into the sanctuary.

2 Chronicles 5:11-14 "and when the priest came out of the holy place [the inner sanctuary] (for all the priests who were present had consecrated themselves, without regard to their divisions, and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kinsman, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and liars, stood east of the altar with 120 priests who were trumpeters; and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving for the Lord), and when the song was raised, the trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the Lord,

"For he is good,
for his steadfast love
endures forever,"

[That's what they sing, and it's what they sing 500 years later when they rebuild and consecrate the sanctuary in Ezra's day...when they sang that song]
The house of the Lord [the sanctuary] was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God. "

Then Solomon gives a blessing and prays an amazing prayer.

2 Chronicles 7:1-3 "as soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priest could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the Temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worship and give thanks to the Lord saying, "for he is good for his steadfast love endures forever."

His love endures forever because He is forever and He is love. God is love. "God is love" and "our God is a consuming fire" and "God is one."

Song of Solomon 8:6 "love is strong as death... it's flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love neither can floods drown it."

Love that never ends is fire that cannot be quenched, the very presence of God. So you see, they sing about the love that endures forever and then they are flooded with the love that endures forever.

The fake things sing about the real thing and the real thing floods the fake thing. They worship and the fake kiss becomes the real kiss.
They prepare the offering and the fire falls. It's so intense that Solomon's priests could not stand the glory and are driven from the sanctuary.

Nonetheless for a thousand years -- one millennium -- God commands his people to worship him in that sanctuary, the Temple. 1000 years -- even though they didn't understand what it meant. How's that for praxis? How's that for the heart having reasons your reason does not know?

Think of it: for a thousand years they offered sacrifices every day -- fire and sacrificial lambs. Their minds couldn't explain it, but their hearts knew it: communion with God involved body broken and blood shed.

At Passover the Kidron Valley was literally a river of lamb's blood while the choir of Levites would sing the Hallel ending with this line, "give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."

He is good. They knew that if the sanctuary was a place safe from the world it was not a place safe from God. If you think safety is about leaving things as they are, God is not safe. Love is not safe, not safe because he's good.

Their hearts knew that steadfast love encountering this world involves pain, that love is a sacrifice, and yet love is like light in darkness. Love is a fire that consumes and purifies and nourishes. Love is a feast of life and even ecstasy for they were commanded to feast on roast lamb in the sanctuary of the Lord, eighty days of commanded feasting and one day of commanded fasting: the day of atonement which we now celebrate as Easter. A thousand years of ritual – a thousand years of liturgy.

Some members of a synagogue complained to their Rabbi, the great Abraham Joshua Heschel. They told him that the liturgy -- the motions of services -- did not express what they felt. He told them that it was not for the liturgy to express what they felt, but for them to learn to feel what the liturgy expressed.

For a thousand years, Israel learned to feel what the liturgy expressed. And then they met what the liturgy expressed. And even then they could barely stand it. In fact they didn't stand it. Like Solomon's priests, they could not stand when God's glory entered the temple, even the temple could not stand.

Through Malachi, the last prophet in the Old Testament, God says to his people and he says to us [on December 18, 2008, my wife heard that we were to read this as a board, and we did]:

"The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple
the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight...
but who can endure the day of his coming
and who can stand when he appears -- for he is like a refiner's fire."

John the Baptist tells us that he will "baptize with fire." And who can stand? Well, we can stand; the church can stand. It happened on Pentecost Sunday in Acts 2:

Acts 2:1-4 "They were all together in one place and suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind... and there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributed in resting on each.... and they were filled with the Holy Spirit."

They were not driven from the house, for God had made them his own house. The fire descended and filled the temple of flesh called the body of Christ. It had been a dead body, but when the fire fell it began to dance. It began to worship -- real worship -- in spirit and in truth.

You see Jesus is the Lord who "suddenly comes to his temple."
Jesus is the covenant and his spirit is the refining fire.
Jesus is the light in the darkness.
Jesus is the life of God given to us -- love poured out for us.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
Jesus Christ and him crucified is the victory of God over everything, the revelation of
"steadfast love that endures forever," love that bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.
And Jesus is the son of David that builds the sanctuary of the Lord.

Not only can you stand in that sanctuary, you are that sanctuary. You are God's sanctuary.

1 Peter 2:4 "come to him to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight
chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house,
to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus
Christ."

Last time we talked about the puzzle pieces and how Christ has made is each like pieces in
the puzzle that is a picture of him. He's made us members of his body -- living stones in the
temple of his spirit. That's why he entered the ancient stone temple and cried out, "destroy
this temple and I will rebuild it in three days." He was speaking of his body; he was
speaking of you.

So he took bread and broke it saying, "this is my body" which is for you. Do this in
remembrance of me. And he took the cup saying this is the new covenant in my blood (they
all knew the life was in the blood) do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

When we, the members, gather to worship Jesus, to remember Jesus, we actually re-
member his body. His body comes together and he fills it with his blood -- his lifeblood. I've
seen and I wish we had time to talk about it, but his blood is fire. It burns away evil and is
itself the unquenchable good. When we come together we form a container -- a sanctuary.

We surrender the fuel that is ourselves and we invite the fire that is God.
We go through the ritual and wait for a spark.
We present our bodies (Romans 12:1) as living sacrifices, which is our spiritual worship.

You see Pentecost isn't just one Sunday. Paul wrote, "be filled and keep on being filled with
the Holy Spirit."

That first Sunday it happened in a very dramatic way. Once it happened to me in such a
dramatic way. I was at a conference several years ago. I had been worshiping, going
through the motions for days, hearing sermons like we preach here, singing the songs are
we seeing here, praying prayers like the ones we pray here. And on the last day I was
literally pinned to the floor. It felt like 1,000,000 V of electricity were coursing through my
body. I was like a living sacrifice entirely lost but entirely found. I had never experienced
such joy as I did in those moments. But I had this clear impression that I could be consumed
-- that if the current was increased at all I'd be utterly destroyed by ecstasy. It was the holy
fire. It was absolutely extraordinary and yet at the same time entirely ordinary.

In fact the Holy Spirit revealed to me that whenever and wherever I have thought a good thought, worship God in spirit and in truth, or loved Jesus a little more it was his spirit in me. It was that fire burning in me.

Well I often pray that the Holy Spirit would come in such an extraordinary way here. That He would just blow our socks off, and pin us all to the floor, and I wouldn't have to prepare any more sermons.

Listen I really do hope and pray that he moves in such an extraordinary way, but I know that he likes to move and ordinary ways. He loves it when you draw near with that mustard seeds of faith in your heart. And you see He fills you with the very same fire.

So have you ever felt conviction while we were worshipping?
Have you ever felt like you need to sacrifice something to Jesus?
Have you ever felt attracted to Jesus as we tell his story?
Have your thoughts on faith, hope, or love as you sing his songs?

That love is eternal fire. "Love is of God..."

And I know what you're thinking: "come on Peter. Those are feelings. They're just chemicals in my blood."

Yeah, so what?!

There will always be chemicals in your blood.

And you say, "Well, it's just getting psyched up."

Perhaps the rest of your life you're getting psyched down. As long as you have a body there will be chemicals in your blood, and as long as you have a brain you will be psyched in one way or another.

According to Scripture, there is a spirit or spirits of this age, and there is also the Spirit from God, that is God. We live in this world surrounded by the spirits of this age. These spirits psych you out, and they change the chemistry in your blood. There is a spirit of this world but when we gather and form the sanctuary, we invite the Spirit of God.

The spirit of this world sings a song that's not really a song; it's a dirge. That spirit tells you that death is the end, that mercy has its limits, that love will finally fail, that the void is the ultimate reality, and therefore fear is the way. The spirit of this world is a lie. A lie we swim in each and every day.

But the Spirit of God is truth and love -- love is the creator. So deeper than death and beyond the void is the fire of love, the substance of God. Darkness, death, and evil will come to an end, but love is the "song that never ends." Even if you started singing it not knowing what it was, you can surrender to it now and start to dance. That song is the deepest truth

and the ultimate reality -- the Logos. We can't comprehend it with our heads, but we can surrender to Him with our hearts. We can fall in love with Jesus -- actually we can *only* fall in love with Jesus.

Last week, we talked about the body coming together. This week I'm saying the body must surrender to the song to begin to dance.

Well if you wake up some Sunday morning and say, "I'm not going to church today. I don't feel like worshiping."

Well of course you don't feel like worshiping, you are swimming in a world of lies. Of course you don't feel like dancing, you're singing the wrong song.

If you say, "Well I'll just be going through the motions. I don't have the right motives."

Of course you don't have the right motives that's why you need to go through the right motions. With the mustard seed of faith that you've got (if you didn't have it you wouldn't even ask the question), come surrender your motives and go through the motions. Offer your fake kiss and pray for a real kiss. Build the sanctuary, lay the sacrifice on the altar, and pray for the fire.

I've been married twenty-six years and I think I love my wife more than ever. But I don't always feel like I love her more than ever. And when I don't feel like it, I know what I need to do: bring the bodies together, place a sacrifice on the altar, and pray for the fire. I need to do the things I did at first. I need to call the restaurant, buy the nice bottle of wine, put the Saide CD in the DVD player and say, "Honey I love you," give her a fake kiss and hope for the real.

This is the sanctuary.
Here's the altar.
Let's have some fire.

[Peter stands next to the fire pit on the table, takes a match and strikes it]

Now this whole time you've been staring at this fire pit and stack of wood on the communion table and unless you're in junior high you've been thinking, "Peter, you better not light that on fire."

And I'm not.

For this is not the fuel and no match can light the eternal fire. This is not the fuel. You are the fuel, and now the fire:

For on the night that He was betrayed, Jesus took the bread and broke it saying, "this is my body which is for you."

Now the fire:

In the same way he took the cup, saying, "this is the new covenant in my blood. Drink of it all of you, and do it in remembrance of me."

You see Jesus sacrificed himself for you and he is offering himself to you. And he's inviting you to offer yourself to him. He burns with love for you and he longs for you to burn with love for him. He wants you to worship with all you've got, and then let him fill the emptiness with fire.

If you were to truly see it now, you'd fall down in terror. So He's breathing it into you in this world, every service, every moment, filling you with His fire because one day, you will be a creature of fire. You will be filled with all the fullness of God.

As you come forward, worship with everything you've got. In other words don't let this be empty ritual. Do it in remembrance of Him. Surrender your heart to Him and He will fill you. Jesus said my Father is good, if you ask for the Holy Spirit, He won't give you a stone, He will give you His Spirit.

So let's worship.

Communion

Benediction

[Prayer]

And so Lord God, in so many ways, I hate this world because it is so dark. But Lord God, I thank you for placing us here so we can see the light and the dark, so we can see the victory of Your love, your love that endures forever. And so Lord God you have called us together as Your Sanctuary, and now we pray that you would fill us with your fire. I thank you that you are filling us with your fire; I thank you that you will fill us with you fire. I don't know exactly how you're going to do it. I would love the knock-down kind of thing, but however you're going to do it, do it. Set us on fire with your love. Fill our sail with your spirit. Cause us to go out of this place singing

the song that does not end. And begins in this world even right here. And so Lord God, fill us with courage because we know the end. We know that you conquer, and you are the end, and we are you people, and your steadfast love endures forever.

[end prayer]

2 Chronicles 7:3 “When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the Glory of the Lord on the Temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worship and give thanks to the Lord saying, “for he is good, his steadfast love endures forever.’

“Then the king and all the people offered sacrifice before the Lord. King Soloman offered a sacrifice, 22,000 oxen [that’s a lot of hamburger, especially if you live in a Bronze Society. That’s like the President blowing up the Navy in joy.] and 120,000 sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God.”

Do you see what happened? God sent sends His sacrifice, they respond in kind with their sacrifice. And it’s like a spontaneous combustion, a chemical reaction of love.

And in the same way, in the New Testament, the fire falls upon the sanctuary, and they all begin speaking in tongues--in all the languages of the people around them--the wonderful works of God. And the fire spreads until it reaches this sanctuary, this morning, here today.

So let’s surrender to the Lord. Let’s build the sanctuary. Let’s surrender our hearts and always invite the Fire.

He is the Lord of Love, and He has made us His Bride. He longs to fill us with fire. So don’t be afraid of the fire. It’s really good.

In Jesus name, believe the gospel.