

After the Fire: Faith, Hope, & Love  
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Short text...we won't try to make this a teaching sermon, just a living one here, one to live. Short text...a verse, comes at the end of 1 Corinthians 13. It's a verse I go to whenever things are confused, whenever things don't go as planned, whenever I'm not sure what the next step is—I go to this verse. And it reads like this:

*But now abide faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

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It's astounding how fast it goes. Cold night; you're standing out there and next to you is the project manager who guided us through the construction of that project. And next to him is the financial manager that led the giving and the process that financially enabled us to do that, guided us through three years of giving to get that building in place. And then around them are volunteers that put in countless hours at that building. And then beside them are also people who went into their life savings to put that building up. And there's people who were just standing there and were just watching. And in a matter of hours so much of it is gone.

There tended to be...the individuals I was with most that night tended to be the problem solvers, the ones that "Ok, we gotta break this down. Here's what we're gonna do next." And so there wasn't a powerful emotion. It was more "Let's sort out what's the next task. Let's figure it out." And on through the night they kept doing that. Every once in a while there'd be a hit of emotion, like for example when they were trying to chase the fire as it would snake through the walls. And there was no flames that you could see, but the fire was inside those walls. And they had heat detectors, and they'd be trying to track that fire. And then they'd whip out the chain saw, and they'd just dig into the side of the building and stop the fire right there. And you'd just hear the chain saw ripping through the building, and you'd just wince. And then they'd crash the windows out and try to get in at some of the other parts of the fire. And you'd just...you'd watch them destroying your building in order to save your building. And you'd just wince at it.

And then one of the contractors comes up, and he gets out of the car, and his wife's there. And she looks at the building, and she just starts cryin'. And it...and you realize this as been a *loss*.

Then you go down through the building eventually, after they finally let us go in, and you come in from the basement. And you're saying, "Ok, this looks bad, but it's not too bad. It's wet, it's soggy, there's tiles that are saturated and everything else, but there's no fire down here." And you go up the stairs and you see the gym and the sanctuary area that we use, and it's in good shape. You'd see water all over the floor, but everything looks good. The piano's not soaked, and all that. And you're sayin', "Oh man, this looks good."

And then you walk into that foyer and it just [*makes blowing impact sound*]. You got twisted...twisted metal, and you got torn apart walls, and everything's coated with ice and foam and everything else. And you realize "This...this is a *loss!*"

But then, a little later, there's a quiet moment when you're sitting with Joel, a reflective moment. And you know how Joel is...he's kinda reflective. And he's just kinda talking, and he just goes, "You know, Larry, I was watching everything go like that and," he said, "I got to thinking. You know the faith that was exercised in this project—it's not gone. You know the hope that sustained this project—it's not gone. And you know the love that was extended in this project—it's not gone."

It's not! Those are the things that abide, and those are the things that are in this room right now. That faith, that hope, that love—it's what matters. It was kinda one of those moments, sitting there with Joel where, you know, in the middle of loss you suddenly see clearly and you're enriched. And that's why this fire will not change what we do.

Now, it may impact how we do it, when we do it, and where we do it. But it will not impact what we do. We will continue, as a congregation, to follow the drumbeat that we have followed for years. Number one—we will choose faith. We will choose faith. And I am not talking about that little ‘huff-and-puff’ “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can” of positive thinking. I am talking about that persevering confidence, that persevering faith that says “I *know* I can’t, but He will.” We will choose faith.

We will live hope. And I’m not talking about that desperation that gropes around in the dark, hoping to find, somewhere in all of this, a silver lining. I am talking about that resilient, confident expectation that the future is good with or without that building, with or without anything else we have, with or without any relationship, even, that we have. We have a good, and glorious, and wonderful future because we have Jesus.

We will choose faith. We will live hope. And oh, most of all, we will follow His heart. We will follow the heart of Jesus towards God, and towards all those around us. We will care. See, situations like this can really make you self-absorbed. And you begin to think that your story is the important story. And you think maybe that the attention that we get is suddenly making and marking how important we are, and ‘boy we gotta make an impression so people will know how good we are,’ all that sort of stuff. Listen—our story isn’t the most important story. It’s just the one getting some attention right now. The most important story may be something that’s happened in your wife or your husband’s life right now, or your child’s life, or your neighbor’s life, or your friend’s life, or another church across town. We’re not gonna get absorbed in our story. We’re gonna follow the heart of Jesus, and we’re gonna care about the people around us. This fire is not gonna change what we do.

But you need to understand this, and you need to understand it very, very carefully. We are gonna live faith...I mean, we are gonna choose faith, we are gonna live hope, and we are really gonna care about others. And it’s not because of our tenacious ‘can-do’ spirit. It’s not gonna be because of our dogged determination. It’s not gonna be because we are some sort of spiritual giants. It’s because Jesus is gonna give us faith. It’s because Jesus is gonna sustain our hope. And it’s because Jesus is going to engage our hearts.

See, that’s the mystery, and the wonder, and the glory of Jesus. He’s the One who gives the faith. He’s the One who sustains the hope. He’s the one who engages the hearts. I don’t understand it all. It’s wonder; it’s mystery; but it’s glory! We get the most precious, lasting things of all—faith, hope, and love, because of Him and through Him.

This is not a time to be endured. This is a time to embrace, because during this time God is going to answer evil. And there is evil in this. And this time God is going to answer evil with good, done by Jesus in, through, and among us. That’s the wonder, that’s the glory, that’s the mystery of Jesus. Embrace it.

Gonna close with just a couple songs. And so I’ll ask the worship team to come up, and the kids will like this because Pastor Kroon’s done. But we’re gonna sing two songs, I believe...three songs. One is a prayer song. It’s a prayer song that was written here. First sung here, was it not? First sung in the other building when we moved. [Aside from Joel—“When we moved.”] When we moved. But it’s a prayer that we sing. It’s a prayer written within our congregation, and it is our prayer even today. And after that we have another carol, and we’re gonna close with the blessing, right?

Go in grace and enjoy it.

[Congregation sings and then is dismissed.]