

# Kindle a Flame

Lockdown is depressing, the weather is cold and the days are busy so it has been a special joy to gather around our wood burning stove on a Sunday afternoon and chat away as we eat our buffet evening meal, usually with Jake, our dog, stretched out in front of the fire. As we watched the living flames making all sorts of wonderful shapes and our bodies warmed up, my thoughts turned to Charles Wesley's hymn:

O Thou who camest from above,  
The pure celestial fire to impart,  
Kindle a flame of sacred love  
On the mean altar of my heart!

It was in the coming of Jesus to dwell with us that love was imparted to us. This is a love that warms our hearts. The incarnate God, the God who is in essence love, is with us. It is an amazing truth. God is with us in all the experiences of life. He draws alongside us, lifts us out of our weariness and gloom and wraps us around in his love. He is our Father.



I found myself reflecting again on this “celestial fire”, the fire from heaven, which is linked to the sacrifice of Jesus’ life for sinners. It was at a meeting in Aldersgate St, London, that John Wesley experienced the Christ who came from above, and by faith received him. It was the moment that the celestial fire penetrated into his heart and he knew that, “Jesus had died to take away my sin, even mine and saved me from the law of sin and death”. It was a heart-warming experience and it was a flame that was inextinguishable.....

There let it for thy glory burn  
With inextinguishable blaze,  
And trembling to its source return,  
In humble prayer and fervent praise.

Charles Wesley had experienced this life-changing revelation four months earlier.

It is said that it was this word “inextinguishable” that was the stumbling block to the popularity of this hymn and there have been several attempts to find another word but no better could be found. It is a wonderful word to describe the flame of God’s love within us that can never be put out. In some churches a light is kept burning on the altar table or beside it as a reminder that the flame of God’s love burns eternally in our hearts.

This hymn uses the verse from Leviticus 6:13, ““The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out”. This passage, 6:8-13, is the Lord speaking to Moses to command Aaron and his sons about the ritual of the burnt offering. It is repeated three times that the fire on the altar for the burning of offerings shall be kept burning.

We are reminded, in the New Testament supremely, that this flame of love is for the whole world and calls for us to “present our lives, a living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1) that others might know his love. Then Christ’s sacrifice finds its fulfilment.

Perhaps today you would like to reflect on the last two verses of this hymn and pray them as a prayer of dedication:

Jesus, confirm my heart’s desire  
To work, and speak, and think for thee;  
Still let me guard the holy fire,  
And still stir up thy gift in me –

Ready for all thy perfect will,  
My acts of faith and love repeat,  
Till death thy endless mercies seal,  
And make the sacrifice complete.

Charles Wesley.