



## *Thoughts on the Journey...*

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The many pine forests in Georgia are beautiful! Whether it be sunlight or moonlight, I particularly love the way light pours its way through the openings of the trees and creates artful dimensions that draw your eye to the magnificence. Most of the roads I drove in Georgia, when I worked for Glenmary Missions, were covered with pine forests which made my driving particularly pleasant.

One autumn evening, I was driving from Claxton to Pembroke. The air became thick with smoke and the smell of wood burning. The sky was flickering with an orange hue as the smoke drifted across the road. The further I traveled, the thicker the smoke and the brighter the flickering orange glow in the sky. Around the bend I went, and there it was: the source of what my senses were taking in. One of the pine forests, that I passed several times a week, was now consumed with fire. Men were assembled on the edge of the road, but no one attempted to extinguish the blaze. The soft light, that I was used to seeing through the forest trees, was now a force of raging heat and destruction that sharply drew my attention to the enormity of it all. Its power created a sense of fear in me and I wanted to get as far from it as soon as I possibly could.

When I arrived at my destination, I told the locals what I had witnessed. To my surprise they already knew about the fire and explained to me that the fire was set intentionally. They called it a *prescribed burn* and that the objective of the burn is to get the fire as hot as possible in order to reduce logging slash and debris. This type of fire exposes bare mineral soil making it easier to plant seedlings for a new forest. They proceeded to tell me that some of the benefits of prescribed burns, include insect control as well as decreasing harmful parasites and disease-causing organisms. Forests that are managed in this way receive higher prices for the land and the lumber. These fires are also a cost-effective forest management tool. Growing up in a city, I had no knowledge of *prescribed burns*. Learning about their benefits gave me an appreciation for their purpose and for the incredible force of fire and its role in renewal and transformation that brings new life.

In Luke's Gospel this week, Jesus is speaking to his disciples and says,

**"I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!"**

He speaks of a baptism that he must receive and that he is constrained until it is complete. Jesus continues with talk of division and asks the question, "Do you think I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division"

His words seem contrary to the Jesus they came to know. But, understand that he is delivering TRUTH to the people. This is the truth that ignites the blazing fire of which Jesus speaks: a truth for their time and for our time. And, this is the truth: Jesus is the Messiah, our Lord and Savior. It was the source of division among the Jews: the division that led to his suffering and death. This is the very truth that creates the division between those who accept the truth of his Good News and those who deny it.

Often, the source of separation in our time can be attributed to the same. It is the truth of Jesus' Good News that either unites us or divides us. Whether we're talking about the world, our communities, our families, or ourselves personally, it is TRUTH that will ignite a blaze that leads to renewal, conversion, and transformation for those who believe. Like a *prescribed burn* in the forest, embracing Jesus as your Lord and Savior, as well as living according to his will, is the very change-agent that will bring you new life and life eternal.

Not all are believers, because believing requires change. It is far easier to accept the status quo of a secular society than to swim against its tide and strive for divine life. Let's face it, following Christ means letting go of this world's notion of peace and happiness when those notions are contrary to the peace and happiness that life in Jesus offers us. When Jesus said he has come to set the earth on fire, he wants us to have the passion and fire of his truth to continue the blaze today, to renew the soil of his kingdom, so that we too, can bring new life to the world and one another.