

John 18:33-37

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "so you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

'Out of the Fire'

by

Brandon Wrencher

Contrary to Pilate in John's gospel, Jesus will not stand from the throne to condemn or engage in the pretense and divisiveness of identity politics ("Are you the king of the Jews?"), No! Jesus' kingship is marked by truth (John 18:38b), which means that what is godless and false about our lives will not be able to stand, but will wither away in the flames. This is not the callousness of fire and brimstone. Instead it's the burning hot love of Jesus' domination. It takes special care to burn away those thorny places of our lives in order to refine us to be what God intended all along. This is gospel. May it be a message like fire in our bones. So much so that it'll break loose and set the world on fire with love. We'll get a head start on what Jesus will consummate when he returns. Only then will we see this kingdom's eternality, with a fire hot enough to burn away any trace of selfishness and ego, drawing together a community from all "peoples, nations, and languages" (Daniel 7:14)

"Steeple People"

Continue to work on your salvation with fear and trembling,
for it is God who is at work in you to will and to act
according to Divine purposes.

Philippians 2:12b-13

In his reflection on this scripture, Rev. Quinn Caldwell wrote: Sometimes you tremble because you're scared, or cold. Sometimes it's because of neurological or muscular issues. Sometimes you just overdid it at the coffee shop. But actually, you're trembling all the time. Everything is. A physicist will tell you that there's not a thing anywhere that's not constantly vibrating, at the atomic level, with the Energy that created and drives the universe. When the Bible speaks of trembling in the presence of God, most people assume it's talking about trembling in fear. Maybe, but I think it's more like this: the closer you get to the sun, the hotter you feel. The closer you get to one of those big metal balls in science class, the more your hair stands up. And the closer you get to the Source of all the creation's energy, the more you vibrate. The trembling that's always there anyway, trace of the Hand that created you, suddenly intensifies. The life of the cosmos courses through you and you begin to hum, to sing like a plucked string. Suddenly, you're all potential energy. And the only thing to do then is to go kinetic. ('Tremble' from God is Still Speaking Daily Devotional, p. 343)

In the summer of 1951, countless folk in and around West Bridgewater went kinetic when the beautiful old steeple of the church took a direct hit during a lightning storm. A fire started in the portion of the steeple upward of the area that housed the bell. The 'All Volunteer' fire department's prompt and daring response resulted in a containment of the fire to the upper areas and a saving of the historic structure. In the interest of safety, the top 30 feet or so was removed and the remainder capped over and waterproofed. The cast bronze weathervane that dated back to the early 1800's was removed and stored in the Foye hay barn on East Center Street where the golf course now stands.

First Church steeple ablaze was a historic event worthy of remembrance in the hearts and minds of all town residents. We remember those faithful first responders who bravely rushed to the scene to save our historic Meeting House. We will always remember the sacrifice of fireman, Leo Lucini. On his way to fight the fire, Leo was tragically killed in an automobile accident on the South Main Street Bridge.

We remember too, those who started up the reconstruction work. Within weeks after the fire, church members initiated a fund drive to replace the steeple. The estimated cost was \$20,000. This amount covered the cost of either a pre-fabricated fiberglass or aluminum steeple structure that was being produced by North/South Carolina companies at that time. The fabrication of the tower base was done by the Ron Snell Construction Company. This infrastructure, which spans from church basement to steeple bottom, is strong enough to hold the steeple in place even against hurricane force winds.

Many town residents and businesses generously contributed to the church's fund raising efforts. Thanks to support from the wider community the fund grew to \$18,000. That was the good news. The bad news was that when the church body decided to use the steeple funds to put a much needed addition onto the church, the fund raising came to an abrupt halt. Donors were angered that the money that they had contributed for steeple reconstruction was being used for another purpose.

We remember too, those who took up the work of finishing the steeple project. By 1975 the church had scraped together enough money to replace the steeple only to discover that the original bronze weather vane had gone missing. That's when an aspiring Massachusetts College of Art student, Karen Turner, offered to design and construct a vane similar in structure to the original one.

The casting was done by Charles Perkins II at the Henry Company, a family owned business in Bridgewater. The cast material was a priority metal called Meehanite. Developed for the military it is lighter and stronger than bronze. People from

the machine shop at Southeastern Regional Vocational bore the pivot hole and cleaned up the casting to a perfect balance. It then went to a company in Mansfield that was owned by a friend of the Perkins family. There it was gold plated with a heavy electroplate. It was finished off by the addition of "iolite bronze" wafers on either side to assure it would never need lubrication and would always point into the wind.

The resulting fish shaped "IKTHUS" is what tops our steeple today. Ichthus is a Greek word for fish. The symbol consists of two intersecting arcs, the ends of the right side extending beyond the meeting point so as to resemble the profile of a fish. It was used by early Christians as a secret Christian symbol and is now known as the 'sign of the fish' or the 'Jesus fish'.

(Warren E. Turner, November 2015)

'Fulfilling spiritual life', wrote Jack Kornfeld, 'can never come through imitation, it must shine through our particular gifts and capacities as a man or woman on earth. This is the pearl of great price'. (In 'Offerings,' (Buddhist wisdom for every day) Today is our day for remembering and recognizing some amazing pearls of great price. For the gift of Life Giving Spirit we humbly pray:

Thank you,

Jesus, God, Spirit,
for being Holy on us.

You dug a dwelling place
and settled tenaciously amen with us,
anointing us with amazing Love.

Thank you, Jesus, God, Spirit, for your incredible grace.

Amen.

And with deep gratitude for those who saved and restored our Meeting House, we say: Thank you, kinetic First Church Steeple People, for your beautiful, sacrificial gifts of love.

Prayer. In the beginning was you, God. All things come into being through you, and without you not one thing comes into being. What has come into being in you was life, and the life was the energy of all the cosmos. Fill us up with that power until we tremble and then send us out full of it to do your work Amen