

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH  
REV. JOHN BURTON  
OCTOBER 2, 2011

SERMON: CONSUMED BY ZEAL  
TEXT: PSALM 69: 1-9A

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.

I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me.

I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.

More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; many are those who would destroy me, my enemies who accuse me falsely. What I did not steal must I now restore?

O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.

Do not let those who hope in you be put to shame because of me, O Lord God of hosts; do not let those who seek you be dishonored because of me, O God of Israel.

It is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that shame has covered my face.

I have become a stranger to my kindred, an alien to my mother's children.

It is zeal for your house that has consumed me;

Zeal is an interesting word.

There is a story about Theodore Roosevelt. As a child he developed a fear of going to church. It wasn't that he wanted to sleep in or play video games or watch TV. He was terrified of going to church. After some weeks of this behavior his mother sat him down, determined to get to the bottom of it. She asked him what was so frightening. He said there was a monster which lived at the church. She wanted to know if he had ever seen it. He said no but that he knew it's name from the Bible. He quoted Psalm 69 from the King James Version: "the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." That would scare me - being consumed by some invisible hunchbacked monster that prowls the pews!

Judd, let's get together and write a screen play - I think Hollywood is ready for a new type of horror movie!

Actually zeal describes an emotion or action which is full of passion or fervor. For example, you can zealously pursue a promotion, kiss your spouse, or play video games!

Our psalmist was in desperate circumstances. Life was falling apart. People hated and despised him. His family was shunning him. As it was so eloquently put in Jesus Christ Superstar, so many years ago, "He could be dead soon, could well be."

Why? Because he had been zealous for God. He had stood up for his faith when others wore disguises. He took serious God's laws.

As a result people hated him.

His only recourse was to pray to God for relief. So he zealously prayed. He was so zealous that his prayer was recorded and is still available nearly 3,000 years later.

What are you zealous about? Work? Your marriage? Sports? Having a good time? Keeping your job or health care benefits? Traveling? Reading? Who or what are you passionate, fervent about?

Today is World Communion Sunday. It is the day, gathered around Christ's Table, we passionately proclaim that all Christians and all churches are "in this together." We fervently declare that we are all serving God to the best of our abilities. We zealously assert that God loves all Christians and God's congregations and that all of us have One Lord, One Faith, and One Hope in Jesus Christ.

And so on this Sunday we stand united with all those others. Today we are in union with:

- All the other congregations of which we have ever been members.  
All the congregations of North Texas.
- All Disciples of Christ congregations.
- First Christian Church of Irving, who is gathering to say farewell to their beloved sanctuary because they have to downsize to a building they can still afford.
- Grace Christian Church in Prosper, where they are worshipping together for the very first time!
- Christians in Israel and Iraq and other countries where the church is dwindling away due to policies that diminish the church and squeeze Christians.

- Both Disciples congregations in Joplin who have now been transformed by surviving a terrible tornado, burying the victims, and ministering to the survivors.

This Table, this loaf and this cup – they are bigger than we are. They are bigger than our human political, social, economic, intellectual, cultural, and ethnic divisions.

This is what we ought to be zealous about: about Jesus, who died for us! And about Jesus love which has the power to save and transform any and every heart which turns to it in faith.

But maybe that is what scares people – maybe that is the “Church Monster” – that if we give ourselves to God fully, completely, without reservation, that God will transform us into someone we don’t know and are not sure we’d like – that God might make us into a white-bread, milk-toast, goody-two-shoes, who looks down his/her

When you come to worship do you feel that Church Monster’s presence?

Did you bring it to church with you!?

Maybe that’s the fear that is keeping you from opening your heart fully to Jesus?

I say: Cast out that Monster! Renounce that demon! God will not abuse your trust, crush your individuality, or take away all your fun! God’s love will increase your joy and bring comfort to your pain.

If Communion were made into a movie it would not be a horror movie, served by some hunchbacked monster – it would be a love story served by the one who died for our sins.

Don’t fear the zeal – be zealous about love of God and love for your neighbors!