

“Snatch others from the fire and save them” (Part Two)

Reflection 34 in the series “Salvation: The Quest”

When we come to the book of Jude in this series on “Salvation: The Quest” it’s this phrase, “Snatch others from the fire and save them,” in verse 23 that I focus on. Let’s consider for a moment what it doesn’t mean. It doesn’t mean some kind of constant vigilantism, anger-based people who take on the self-appointed job of moral watchdogs. And it certainly doesn’t condone the kind of feeding frenzy some evangelicals in America engage in when one of their own falls.

It does mean building such relationships of trust in the church that when you fear someone is playing too close to the fire you know what to say and when to say it and how to say it in ways that will be understood to be loving. When I think of the notion of snatching from the fire, I think of walking along with my grandson Ezra and watching that he not go too close to the edge, that he not climb too far to fall, that he not run or scoot too fast to stop, that he not get so excited he forgets to think – all because I so deeply love Ezra.

But with adult friends in church, I go another way. Conditioned as I am by our culture to mind my own business, I let them edge closer and closer to the fire. And so my friend is infatuated with this woman. He married well! But now he’s bored. The qualities that drew him to his wife, he’s long ago taken for granted. And now there’s this other woman. She’s interesting. She listens well. And she makes him feel like he hasn’t felt in a long time. And I do what? Just let him? Really?

So over and over in the course of our lives, in the course of our friendships, in the course of being church together, people we care about draw closer and closer to the fire. They want what it is not theirs to have. They seek a relationship that has no real future in it. They insist on having their own way. They do what decidedly weakens their faith and the faith of others. They knowingly do what they know is wrong. They are driven by an insatiable hunger for “more.” They take greater and greater risks in life just to flirt with whatever it is they dream about, or fantasize about. They become more and more dysfunctional in the all the other areas of their life, more dishonest, more secretive, more fearful, less responsible for the family and friends God has already given them, and more angry with those who stand between them and what they want. And what do we do? Just let them? Really? In what sense is this loving?

So sometimes like a moth
we fly closer to the light and closer to the flame.
We want.
We want it so much.
We want it now.
We feel this is so right for us.
After all these years.
Closer to the light and closer to the flame.
We know there are risks.
Big risks.
We know we hurt others.

We know we leave others doing what it's ours to do.
 But we want.
 We want it so much.
 We want it now.
 Closer to the light and closer to the flame.
 We know how this began.
 From a dark, needy, lonely place in our souls.
 From deep hunger we cannot even name.
 But we want.
 We want it so much.
 We want it now.
 Closer to the light and closer to the flame.
 We cross a line.
 And then another.
 We burn a bridge.
 And then another.
 We call it love.
 We do want.
 We want it so much.
 We want it now.
 And after God has listened to us
 over
 and over
 and over,
 and still over again,
 he lets us.
 Apart from forcing us, God has no choice.
 We want it so much.
 And so we fly off
 closer to the light and closer to the flame.
 Lord God, turn our wantings into longings,
 longings for you.
 And give us people in our lives
 to show us the way back home,
 away from the flame, back into the light.

This too is part of the quest that is salvation. It's rescue. It's deliverance. It's healing. And it's also part of loving, as sure as when I walk with Ezra I keep watching that he not go too close to the edge, that he not climb too far to fall, that he not run or scoot too fast to stop, that he not get so excited he forgets to think – all because I so deeply love him.

So what is it that we really owe one another? Aren't we called to such love for one another that we know one another and protect one another, that when needed we call one another back to our higher selves, and that we know when to act in love and we know how to say what we have to say? And so we pray in the Spirit and we keep ourselves where? In God's love.

And then the great doxology that ends the book of Jude breaks forth:

To him who is able
to keep you from falling
and to present you
before his glorious presence
without fault
and with great joy
– to the only God our Savior
be glory,
majesty,
power
and authority
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
before all ages,
now and forevermore!
Amen.

– Dale Pauls