

Water and Fire:

Life in the Balance

Rev. Patrick Stephens

Third Week of Lent

Saturday March 26

Scripture

Isaiah 37:31

The surviving remnant ... shall again take root downwards, and bear fruit upwards.

Reflection

An extremely vast forest system, the Canadian Boreal forest stretches right across this country and has long shaped the life and culture of its inhabitants. Among the many examples of biodiversity found within the Boreal Forest is the iconic jack pine tree.

As trees go, the jack pine is not especially large or beautiful. It is, however, reliably present from the Atlantic Ocean to the Rocky Mountains. And it stands as a sign of hope for those who know its secret.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the jack pine tree is the way by which it reproduces. While the tree itself is extremely vulnerable to damage by fire, the seeds actually require very high temperatures to be released from their cones. Forest fires burn quickly and fiercely through jack pine populations, apparently destroying all vegetation in their path. But as the charred remains of a natural forest fire begin to cool, newly released seeds offer the promise of new life. Having been protected by tightly armoured and resin-sealed cones, seeds are now ready to do what seeds do best. They thrive in the freshly charred ground, very quickly turning the landscape green again.

While the threats of danger in our world are very real, I draw much hope and comfort from the quiet example of the jack pine. As we witness, respond to, and endure the literal and metaphorical fires of this life, may we also be inspired to protect, nurture, and sustain new life for the future.

Prayer

*God of life and nurture,
we entrust to you
the care and protection
of the most vulnerable members
of your creation.
When environmental threats loom,
help us to protect life,
nurture growth,*

*and to join you
in sustaining that which brings new life
to our barren land.*

Amen.

Rev. Patrick Stephens, St. Barnabas Anglican, Deep River

Fort McMurray two years on

By The Rev. Dane Neufeld, April 30, 2018

It is difficult to believe that we are now approaching the two year mark from the Fort McMurray Horse River wildfire. It seems a long time ago now and yet the effects of the fire are always with us. While some of our lives have long since returned to normal, other people are still rebuilding their houses, negotiating with insurance companies or trying to settle in other places. Many more still struggle with the aftermath of trauma and the enormous stress of the evacuation and the ways in which it destabilizes many people's lives emotionally, financially and in some cases, employment and even health.

We are very grateful for the funds donated to PWRDF that have in many ways allowed our churches to have a meaningful and healing impact in our community. It has been rewarding to partner with agencies such as:

- the Center of Hope who care for the homeless and needy in our city
- Habitat for Humanity, who are assisting in rebuilding of houses for those whose insurance coverage was inadequate
- Stepping Stones youth shelter and Kings Kids Promotions who serve our city's youth, a segment of the population whose lives were greatly disrupted by the fire.

PWRDF funds have contributed to the construction and launching of a youth recording studio and music program through a local high school. This past fall the first youth event was held where young people were invited to share their musical and other artistic gifts, many of which expressed thoughts and emotions related to the fire. It was a powerful and healing event for all involved and we were grateful to have played a part in its creation.

A large portion of the funds was used to assist underinsured or uninsured individuals with living expenses. From the beginning there were many people in this situation and for some the problem has increased with time. Construction delays and in some cases abandoned contracts, have left a number of people without any resolution to their claims, and as we approach the two year mark, the insurance covering living expenses will expire for many people. Despite requests from local government, it seems these policies will not be extended which means some people will be paying both rent and mortgage payments a situation that may overwhelm many. We hope to continue providing assistance where possible in these circumstances.

The last two summers we have partnered with On Eagle's Wings who have come to Fort McMurray to run kids' camps. They have been a great success and an important opportunity for kids to reflect on what happened and to give thanks for the ways in which we were cared for during the disaster. Immediately following the fire the camps provided a structured way for children to be together after a long time apart, and after many families had not yet returned or decided to relocate elsewhere.

PWRDF funds have gone towards the building of a community garden on the property of All Saints' downtown. The garden was built in collaboration with the YMCA and many other donors and community members, who saw the importance of making a beautiful space in the downtown and creating the opportunity for people to come together to build something new and living in the wake of the fire's destruction. The garden committee, made up of Church and community members, has hosted numerous events for families and children and workshops for gardeners. Many people in the neighbourhood use it as a place to sit, relax and enjoy. Habitat for Humanity donated two playhouses that are a huge hit with the neighbourhood kids. We are very grateful for the ways that the garden has drawn people together. The visual effects of the fire remain with us every day. The once beautiful and lush river valleys of Fort McMurray have been dramatically altered so it has been a source of joy and renewal to be engaged in the planting and beautifying of a once vacant lot.

Read the whole story on our website at

<https://pwrdf.org/fort-mcmurray-two-years-on/>

Tomorrow:

*The Fourth Sunday in Lent, take a Sabbath rest
and reflect on last week's readings*