

Fahrenheit 451

Fahrenheit 451 – 451 degrees above zero, Fahrenheit – *It's the temperature at which book paper catches fire, and burns...* Spontaneously combusts. This is the title of a book by Ray Bradbury that I read as a high school student. It made a lasting impression on me.

Bradbury wrote of a time when people began to embrace new media (in this case, film and television), sports, and an ever-quicken pace of life. Where books were ruthlessly abridged or degraded to accommodate short attention spans ... (the book was written in the 1950's). Meanwhile small groups protested the controversial, complicated, depressing content they knew in literature. Comic books, trade journals, and magazines remained, as these fed into the mainstream population's desire for mindless entertainment.

Books become so threatening that fire brigades are organized to burn books – first, controversial books and then ANY books... The protagonist, Guy Montag, joins as a firefighter.

As a teenager, I found it a harrowing scenario.

This many years later – as the family picture over the hearth is replaced by a wide-screen TV – family homes contain fewer and fewer actual books. This scenario grows to nightmare proportions. When all the books are burned...

Ash Wednesday

This last Wednesday evening we came together around the ASHES: The ashes of palms left behind on the road celebrating Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. We came to observe Ash Wednesday – the beginning of Lent. The season of 40 days' preparation for Easter – a time of identifying with Jesus in temptation and trial, miracles & madness, on His journey to the Cross.

"The Word is so near..."

Do you remember the bumper sticker: ***"If God seems far away... Ask: Who moved?"***

We may feel distant from the presence of God. We may long to hear Jesus' speak, as His disciples did. Seeing Him heal – Pushing back on the Skeptics and the Religious Right – Pulling a little child onto His knee. Jesus became the Word-made-flesh in order that we – *made flesh* – might encounter God come near.

The season of Lent

The season of Lent pulls us back into our humanity with the reminder: *"Dust you are. Of dust you were created. To dust you will return."* And in that recollection we encounter Jesus as He embraces HIS humanity – and in solidarity with us experiences His own mortality.

'Becoming like us, that we might become like Him'. Not 'out there somewhere' but right here, right now. And the way we grasp hold and experience Jesus is through the Word-made-Text of Scripture.

We know Jesus because we know the **Word**. The psalmist, Peter and Paul all agree that this concrete book of words – when encountered – becomes a transformative experience of the Word made flesh – JESUS.

Not up in Heaven beyond reach / Nor beyond the sea / Not so mysterious / The word is very near you: in your heart and your mouth.

The Way of Scripture

The Theme of our Lenten gathering is taken from this little workbook – which can be ordered – “**The Way of Scripture:**

“A Place of Transforming Encounter”

That the Scriptures, the Word of God, presents to us Christ incarnate; that is, in-the-flesh. The speaker said: “If every worship service, every sermon, and ... the sacraments are to be founded on Scripture, why not every day?”

I went home and looked up his recommendation – and I’d be delighted to share them with you after Church! This would be a beautifully concrete way to journey in concert through Lent. Our reading on the *Way of Scripture* would be the Scripture itself! Presenting ourselves to God’s Word each day, the place for *Transforming Encounter*.

... and that’s what took me back to Fahrenheit 451.

In the context of burning the home of an old woman, full of books, 1,000s of books... The woman chooses to remain and burn with her books. From the pyre made from the mountain of books, Guy Montag slips one and hides it in his large pocketed coat.

He begins to read... and begins to be transformed. I won’t tell you the rest of the story – it’s worth reading... Or watching the last year’s movie made from the book.

After losing everything, our protagonist, Montag, wanders out into the Wilderness and finds others like himself who have left behind the meaningless existence and are being transformed by the books they’ve rescued – memorizing them – in order to save them even through fire.

With help, Montag realizes he has memorized portions of the stolen book he had read so many times. And he begins to recreate from memory the Book of Ecclesiastes: “*To everything there is a season. A time for every purpose under Heaven.*”

The Word is so near...

Rev. Kristin Frederich