

The Gospels Heat Up---Luke 12
Becca Stevens August 19, 2007

If you can't stand the heat, get out of the Gospel is what I am reading between the sparks rising from the pages of the 12th chapter of Luke. Its a great gospel for this sweltering season. Things are heating up here in the south and it doesn't take a great prophet to see it. Newspapers, meteorologists, and strangers on the street all tell us the south wind is blowing bringing scorching heat and drought. The grass is returning to dust, the creeks are warm, the pavement is getting soft, and fragile woods are shedding leaves. It's so dry that shedding feels useless.

This heat sets the mood for what is happening in the Gospel. Jesus is ready to head toward the city that kills its prophets as the Pharisees tell him that Herod wants him dead. The talk has turned from religious metaphors to political warnings that make heat rise. It is like a speech by a coach at half-time to a team that is trailing. He is stepping up his rhetoric as he prepares the disciples for giving the rest of their lives for the sake of the Gospel. While the message is peace, he is saying it is not going to be peaceful when we talk about loving without judgment and sharing all we have. People are going to be mad.

This heat sets the mood not just for the weather, or for the historical context of this gospel, but for what we need in our faith. We need to feel the heat, take it in, and let it fan the flames of our passion. Such heat makes us divisive, like Jesus says. We feel undone that it is not peaceful when we face injustice in our world and in our selves. It makes us, like Jeremiah says, tire of talk of dreams and long to hear the truth of God. We don't have patience in the heat. It makes us, like the prophet says, worry and pray for the widow and poor among us. If you are homeless or worrying if you have enough money to pay the electric bill, everyone is praying with you. It makes me uncomfortable.

I heard a woman say last week that she knew about treasures of the heart from this Gospel. Oh my Lord, I thought, Jesus is just getting started. He still is going to call Herod a fox, tell the story of the rich man and Lazarus, and condemn the rich ruler. It's going to get hotter for him before he lets it all go and offers his life for the sake of love. He is also going to tell his friends they don't know anything and that the last may be first. Jesus keeps stepping up the heat until we can hear him and wake up to the suffering of our brothers and sisters, see our own suffering in it, and feel the real worth of love in the world. I dare us to come to our faith unchallenged in this heat. We do not have it right yet. There are still children in this world with no water in places hotter than this. There are still people who want to draw a circle and say these folks are in and these are out. There are still people who love with judgment. All of us need to feel the heat in our own hearts and where our faith is calling us to stir up the fire of passion in our hearts, for the sake of love.