**Luke 3:7-18**

Although they are still burning, **the California fires** don’t make the headlines anymore.

Even though Camp Fire is now the worst in the state’s history and only 75% contained we don’t hear much about it.

Perhaps we’ve become accustomed to their demise, the world has moved on even though more than 8,400 fires burned close to 2 million acres in California this year.

Tens of thousands forced to flee their homes; hundreds of people missing or dead. Sometimes we cannot begin to imagine the devastation...the misery inflicted upon the people, animals and property.

Though we are removed from their plight; even helpless to a degree, we can support them in donation and always keep them in prayer.

We can pray for healing and growth, knowing that in spite of the pain and suffering there is always **hope**.

Eventually there will be growth once again in these areas. We have seen it in previous fires like Yellowstone National Park

where a third of its forest was destroyed after culmination of two fires, one in 1984 and one in 1988 making it the biggest wildfire in the history of the US. *BioScience*, Volume 49, Issue 2, 1 February 1999, Pages 93–97,<https://doi.org/10.2307/1313532>Yvonne Baskin **Published 1999**

There was so much damage to Yellowstone a wooden boardwalk was built over the darkened land and a sign post high above the Yellowstone River to commemorate the devastation.

It was a sign of hope for the people promising “the site would reseed itself with grasses and shrubs ...over time... possibly decades.”

Fortunately it only took one decade – 10 years for – the charred ground to seed a small forest of pines about 5-6 feet high. Nature rejuvenated itself.

In fact Yellowstone forests revived at a faster rate than expected; Douglas-firs replaced themselves, as did the grasslands and sagebrush.

The elk, bison and the fish were barely affected. And, invasive weeds gained very little ground in those burned areas. (For early reviews of the ecological consequences of the fire, see *BioScience* 39:678–722.)

Not even a bad seed could overwhelm a good one.

The pictures of before and after show Yellowstone trees having more than tripled in size since the 90s.

The landscape is lush and green carpeted with potential of full beauty once again.

This rapid rebound from the ashes proves that the aftermath of a fire can lead to biodiversity and new growth and life.”

A place where life offers a variety and sometimes different forms of newness.

“Fire *can* spark new life...after.”

If God can raise up children from stones surely God can restore life to barren scorched land.

If God can raise up children from stones, then surely God can restore life to humanity.

For we are like a forest of trees –

We breakdown under pressure; we become stressed - burned out -when life takes a turn for the worse.

When we are overwhelmed, suffocated by demands, and self expectations...or fear that we are being punished for some past sin, we are no different than a burnt forest.

The burden of loss can create confusion, and cause weakness and depression.

Whatever the loss ... it might be as simple as too many cloudy, cool and wet days, or canceled plans, or sickness;

it can be as life changing as an accident, disease or some other devastation that takes all the oxygen out of our day...

loss can be experienced in a variety of ways.

It’s almost impossible to wrap our heads around some of it.

there are similar annihilations concurring around the world daily compounding the negativism against goodness and the very air we breathe.

There is new danger in northern California. The air so thick with smoke it now ranks among [the dirtiest](https://www.purpleair.com/map#2.03/14.87/-100.45) in the world. ...but I speak a different kind of air pollution....

As you just heard this morning, the youth focused of an all too prevalent kind of annihilation... HATRED.

The theme at Winterfest this year was Dear Hate. It may have formed around the song written by Maren Morris 3 years ago and recorded with Vince Gill after the Vegas shootings.

It begins...

Dear Hate -I saw you on the news today; Like a shock that takes my breath away...

When the girls showed up here last Sunday after everyone had left they were bubbling over with excitement.

They couldn’t wait to tell me all about their amazing experience at Spooky Nook Sports Complex;

the songs they sang, the discussions they had, the awesome speaker.

Perhaps these young people were relieved to hear adults discussing something so real in their lives.

Maybe they needed to be in a large gathering of esteemed grown-ups, for support, hope, and hear some of their stories lessening these young peoples’ burdens ...just a little.

Youth gatherings like this one put on by our synod offer the kids hope. They need to know what hope looks like.

If God can raise up children from stones, then surely God can restore confidence and optimism to our young people.

There is far too much hatred in the world...and it spreads like wildfire. Oftentimes people mirroring one another, letting hearsay be truth rather than learning the facts.

James chapter 3 verses 5-6 remind us that the tongue can be as detrimental as a flame.

*“... a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire.*

*It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire...”*

No matter what happens to us or around us we can pull ourselves up from the ashes...with the help of others and through the power of Christ we can make a nice recovery...build a plush new planet, and fill lives with hope.

We have to share this hope with others especially our young people.

We can grow and excel in new and exciting ways. For...where this is hope, peace will be close behind – tranquility will consume us and allow hearts and minds to rejuvenate...to be renewed.

And where there is hope and peace, soon joy will replace the tears...

If God can raise up children from stones, then surely God can restore life to us and to our children.

The song Dear Hate concludes with these words,

Dear Love -Just when I think you've given up  
You were there in the garden when I ran from your voice  
I hear you every morning through the chaos and the noise  
You still whisper down through history and echo through these halls  
And tell me love's gonna conquer all --[love is] gonna conquer all

When we leave today maybe we can carry this prayer asking God to... cast away the works of darkness...help us rise us up from earth’s bondage

Pray for God to shield us with His mercy and with words of love draw near. Amen