

Tree of Death; Tree of Life

By Liz Manning

It is a horrible tragedy when monstrous wildfires kill people and livestock, or engulf and destroy homes, businesses and even whole communities. Yet a fire opened the eyes of my heart to see God's love in a different way.

About five years ago, I saw God working in an unlikely place, and it opened my heart in amazement of God's love.

I had been asked by my brother, who lives in Mason County, to be a volunteer in a scheduled fire burn at his property. The day had started with the fire boss leading the prayer for the controlled burn, which was supposed to restore health and spur new growth to the ranch land. We volunteer workers checked temperature, wind gusts, humidity and of course, the fire itself, keeping it in designated boundaries.

The end of our work day produced a visually ugly landscape of scorched earth, dead trees still smoking, bushes destroyed, not a wisp of green. We surveyed the blackened ground, burned cactus, and dead trees and brush. It looked like torches had blistered the earth, and they had.

That evening we drove through the property in the dark, and there I saw a hollow tree still hot but not on fire. It was glowing inside the trunk and on the exterior at the same time. It seemed alive with tiny twinkles of light, like sparkling bright fireflies rising to the sky. Its beauty and its serene glow were entrancing and rivaled Christmas-tree beauty.

I was amazed at the sight of such loveliness in the surrounds of such devastation. It was a visual reminder to me that God was there, that God was present in my life, in the life of the earth, in the life of the ranch and in all of us at that moment. I will never forget the feeling. I did not want to leave.

Months later spring brought the native grasses back; the lush green hues returned with wild flowers, good old scrubby oak volunteers and even some of those invasive cacti. God's promise.

Paul challenges us to "see" with our hearts more than with our senses or our minds. Paul prays that we live, perhaps with the holy spirit as our guide, so that we see God in all things, in all people, in all events.

I saw those embers of beauty as sign that God's power and his love thrive in unlikely places, in everyday life and challenging times, and maybe even in me.

I don't always see with an enlightened heart, but I think it is possible for all of us. If we focus on God's presence, we may see through God's eyes to find spiritual sparkles in all people and in difficult times.

Questions for reflection

1. Where have you recently seen God when you least expected to find God?
2. What dark place might you be going through right now that could look different if you changed your perspective?

3. What practices might you employ to see beyond what you expect to see?