

***First and Center  
Pastor's Blog  
April 16, 2019***



I was 17 years old, on a trip with my high school French teacher, a graduation present from my parents. Notre Dame was the first great cathedral I ever entered, and I was unprepared for the impact of the art and architecture. That was back in the days before their big cleaning, so it was dark and some of the windows were not as clear. The presence of 800 years of a cloud of witnesses, however, was palpable.

I felt the same thing many years later when I stood in Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. A different kind of beauty there than in Paris, but beautiful nonetheless. And the prayers of many generations echoed off those walls.

Notre Dame was nearly destroyed yesterday. Fortunately, the fire at Al-Aqsa was smaller and more easily contained, as was a small fire at St. John the Divine in NYC, also a place of great beauty and spiritual power. Three Black churches in Louisiana, however, suffered catastrophic fires, set purposely by a young white arsonist.

Here's the thing: it's Holy Week: A time when we remember suffering and death, and then remember that what seems to be the end is only the beginning. Resurrection is real and palpable (ask the disciple Thomas!) and possible. Things are not always put back just as they were in the rising, but new life comes out of ashes, like the proverbial Phoenix.

After 9/11, Bruce Springsteen wrote a song called *The Rising*. As I watched Notre Dame burn and thought of the other fires in holy places, these words came to my heart.

*Sky of blackness and sorrow (a dream of life)  
Sky of love, sky of tears (a dream of life)  
Sky of glory and sadness (a dream of life)  
Sky of mercy, sky of fear (a dream of life)  
Sky of memory and shadow (a dream of life)  
Your burnin' wind fills my arms tonight  
Sky of longing and emptiness (a dream of life)  
Sky of fullness, sky of blessed life*

*Come on up for the rising  
Come on up, lay your hands in mine  
Come on up for the rising  
Come on up for the rising tonight*

~ The Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,  
Transitional Minister