

Several years ago I was fortunate enough to attend a national conference of adult educators and privileged to spend some time with one of the authors of a book I had just read during my masters studies. Laurent Daloz was a co-writer of a text with which I felt very connected. He had been among a team of scholarly researchers who had just published, *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World*, and Laurent was a guest at the conference, presenting their qualitative study on what motivated some individuals to take the path of philanthropy and social justice over accruing and keeping immense wealth, especially when American culture worships and encourages such behaviors. They studied 100 individuals who felt moved to respond to the world for the common good of society and sought to ask the question, why?

Through interviews and observations the authors developed a thesis based on two consistently identified variables that motivated these individuals to use their wealth and influence for the passionate betterment of humanity versus personal comfort and luxury, or *common fire*. The first finding was that, from an early age, each of the individuals studied had been exposed to an idea called “otherness”. These people had seen other versions of neighbors, community members, or leaders that did not look, worship, speak, eat or dress like them, and were guided in their youth to see the people they encountered as “we and us” versus unlike “me and mine”. In this otherness encounter, each had identified themselves as a part of one human family. They related less to any sense of tribalism, conversely viewing diversity as a quality to be embraced. It seems they identified with the *commonality* of being human.

The second finding was that each of these generous and civically minded individuals had at some time as a youth or young adult endured an emotionally or physically critical wounding that later in life compelled them to take up their cause in the world as a champion for justice and wholeness. Each subject of the study had allowed their trauma to inform and inspire their life’s narrative. It was as if their very personal pain served to ignite a *fire* bent on advocating for others who had or might experience the same fate, hence they were moved by a *common fire*.

Otherness, and fiery passion. It was, it still is the Jesus message. Whether you have been transformed by it, tentatively acknowledge it, or are investigating the tenets, we are called to it. From Doctrine and Covenants:

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10 a. Collectively and individually, you are loved with an everlasting love that delights in each faithful step taken. God yearns to draw you close so that wounds may be healed, emptiness filled, and hope strengthened.

b. Do not turn away in pride, fear, or guilt from the One who seeks only the best for you and your loved ones. Come before your Eternal Creator with open minds and hearts and discover the blessings of the gospel anew. Be vulnerable to divine grace.

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9 a. Beloved children of the Restoration, your continuing faith adventure with God has been divinely led, eventful, challenging, and sometimes surprising to you. By the

grace of God, you are poised to fulfill God's ultimate vision for the church.

b. When your willingness to live in sacred community as Christ's new creation exceeds your natural fear of spiritual and relational transformation, you will become who you are called to be. The rise of Zion the beautiful, the peaceful reign of Christ, awaits your whole-hearted response to the call to make and steadfastly hold to God's covenant of peace in Jesus Christ.

c. This covenant entails sacramental living that respects and reveals God's presence and reconciling activity in creation. It requires whole-life stewardship dedicated to expanding the church's restoring ministries, especially those devoted to asserting the worth of persons, protecting the sacredness of creation, and relieving physical and spiritual suffering.

d. If you truly would be Community of Christ, then embody and live the concerns and passion of Christ.

e. The challenges and opportunities are momentous. Will you remain hesitant in the shadows of your fears, insecurities, and competing loyalties? Or will you move forward in the light of your divinely instilled call and vision?

f. The mission of Jesus Christ is what matters most for the journey ahead.

If we are serious disciples of a resurrected Jesus, if we are truly committed to expressing that discipleship, may we find a ***common fire*** in Community of Christ.

Sara