



Pastor's Page

Scarred for life

For me the month of November will always be associated with Bonfire Night. This event played a major role in my childhood – it gave shape and purpose to my year (really!!) You see it was the next big thing after the summer holidays. For my mates and me it wasn't just a night in mid Autumn to look forward to it was an all-embracing activity that dominated 2 months of our lives each year. Yes as soon as we went back to school in September, we got started on our mission of "Bonfire collecting" We were determined that we would have the biggest Bonfire in the neighbourhood and so we devised a strategy. It was simple but brilliant; start collecting earlier than anyone else (it was August some years!!) and keep going longer than anyone else (we never had the fire on 5th November, always the nearest Saturday after the 5th - clever?!!) And we always tried to keep the wood in gardens belonging to the Gang as opposed to the fields so as not to leave ourselves vulnerable to attacks from rival gangs. These attacks would come in the form of either the wood being stolen or worse still, the "stack" being set on fire by unscrupulous mobs. It was a dangerous business folks, but someone had to do it! In order to protect the wood further we would keep at least two people behind at all times to guard the stack whilst others went out on raids. We even staggered our meals in order to give maximum protection. We built dens too amongst the wood to "house" those on lookout duty and huddled round small fires night after night defying the wintry winds. The weight of the wet wood fished out of the Rochdale canal and the long walks back through unforgiving fields made the task a huge challenge to all collectors. But I, along with my friends, never gave up.

And when the great day finally arrived the whole street turned out (despite my attempts to ban the girls who hadn't collected any wood!!) Dads were on paraffin and fireworks duty, Mums were on food and seating arrangements and the kids were on their best behaviour in order to be allowed to stay out until the final embers died (which was usually about Wednesday!!) But the memory of those glorious fiery furnaces that illuminated our November nights will stay with me forever, not least because my body still bears the scars from those distant days.

This whole tradition is based on "the gunpowder plot" a failed attempt in 1605 to blow up the houses of parliament. In the early 17th century an act of parliament was passed to appoint 5th November in each year as a time of thanksgiving for the 'joyful day of deliverance.' Now, whilst we may enjoy the odd firework at this time of year (even if not 8 weeks of Collecting Bonfire wood!) we most likely don't connect or want to celebrate the events of 1605. Yet as Christians we have a much greater "day of deliverance" to celebrate – namely the day 2000 years ago when Jesus paid the price for our sins at Calvary. As Graham Kendrick wrote;

Come see his hands and his feet
The scars that speak of sacrifice
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered.
This is your God...

My scars point back to childhood pursuits but Jesus scars point the way to heaven. Thank the Lord for this great deliverance and for such a great saviour.

4th November 2007