

Spirit Effects!

This story is often heard as a “what happened then” than a “what is to be” story, and yet it is both. There is wonder in hearing of “that” day, understanding that those disciples, those who were seeking to experience life lived with awareness and in harmony with God as they had seen in the life of Jesus, gathered. They gathered perhaps in a mixture of confusion, excitement, wonder and apprehension. There were those things they had experienced or shared as a community, a community of faith. There were also those things unique to each.

The expectations they gathered with are unknown, yet I suspect that none came expecting what they experienced. In the midst of that which they knew came that which was foreign, that which was not of them. Like, yet not, the rush of wind. Appearing like tongues of flames, yet not a consuming fire. Ancient words of Scripture spoken, yet bringing new understanding and discernment, minds changed and hearts melted.

This was the story of that day, yet it is not the whole of the Pentecost story. When we understand it to be only a story of one day, we miss much. It is easier to deal with, to hear and to separate ourselves from as a “what happened then” story. Much like categorizing prophesy as fortune or future telling, whether then the naming the current reality and holding it against what is known to be the will and way of God. For future or fortune is out of our control, yet the choices we make, the beliefs, the priorities, the powers we allow to shape us are certainly stem from our choices. On that day God, named as the Holy Spirit, met and intermeshed with those very human beings who had gathered. The nature of humanity and the will of God collided in a way which created a stark awareness to the norm of God ignored. Often talked about as a miracle of language, this moment of hearing, of listening, considering, pondering and responding, changed or challenged all gathered. Just as “what is to be” each time prophetic words are met with openness and invitation for Spirit led reflection and transformation. As a story of “what was” the Spirit’s arrival, we hear a call to wait upon the God, as a story of “what is to be” we are called to acknowledge that the Spirit is among us, that bidden or not God is present, and we have the God given privilege and power to either embody or ignore that Spirit.

This is more than an intellectual exercise, a mental agreement or exclusion. It is a surrender of self to something greater. We often hear of “side-effects”, of those things which result from the ingesting of medicines. As a “once was” story, we see some of the Spirit-effects, some of the ways in which with God we transcend our humaneness. Very different persons, with very different personalities, saw past their differences to embrace their connectedness.

Paul delved into “Spirit-effects”, helping the community of faith to grow in the ability to see in themselves and others that discernable difference of the Spirit within. God’s Spirit does not overtake our individuality; God works with and empowers each individual to grow in their unique gifts, to embrace the grace within themselves, as well as to appreciate what God has given us in others that complements and completes that which is within ourselves. A Spirit-effect is contentment chosen over competition. Another is appreciation chosen over aggravation.

The Spirit works in unexpected and uncontrollable ways. The Spirit rises in us, not from us. Compassion, kindness, love, hopefulness begin without human effort. Each then chooses if they will nurture and work from these gifts of God, or ignore and stifle them. When we respond, it is

without our primary concern being how we will be affected afterwards. This is a great in the “what is to be” as can be seen in the “what happened then.” When the Spirit is hindered, there are also effects. Issues of control, struggles over power, fear of others, these all rise as a part of the frustrations and lack of fulfillment when the Spirit is ignored.

We may ask if the Holy Spirit is in us, why we are not moved. Why do we not experience the effects of the Spirit? Even though the Spirit is within us, ever-ready to shower upon us the impulse to follow God, we can cover up that impulse. We know fog can crowd out the sun. We also know that the sun is still there, but cannot share the bright warmth because of the clouds. In the same way, our own busyness, our insistence on keeping God at arm's length, our personal choices about what we will or won't do, our complex desires and needs, our wounded self searching for affirmation, our guilt and obligation can crowd out the Spirit. The Spirit is still there, but cannot move within us because we have clouded and crowded it out.

But when we let go of our tenacious hold on our own way of thinking and being in this world, we create a gap for the Spirit to slip through. Just as those gathered on that “once was day” did. The slightest space is all that is needed. In one wisp of a moment, a “what is to be moment”, we may detect the scent of sweetness, or find our heart on fire, or feel our feet beginning to dance, or see our hands reaching to serve.

And, in that miraculous moment, unbidden, unexpected, unselfish, we are lifted out of the ordinariness of our daily life into a broad expanse of love and we know ourselves to have been touched by the Spirit, moved by the Spirit, and called by the Spirit to respond with loving abandon. We know that the Spirit-effects are around us and can become more and more the reality of the life “as it is to be”.

Then, as we embrace the Spirit with an ever growing, loving, trusting, faith, the most powerful and certain Spirit-effect will be manifested, the continual choice to live with our lives, our hopes and our priorities firmly centered in the choice of being God centered rather than self centered. Pentecost is an ongoing story, a past, current and future promise and potential. Yet it can only be realized if we are willing, boldly willing, to accept and embrace that which only God can do.