

Stories of Transformation: From Still to Stirred!

May 23, 2010

By Mary Jane Button-Harrison

Acts 2:1-21

When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.

There were many Jews staying in Jerusalem just then, devout pilgrims from all over the world. When they heard the sound, they came on the run. Then when they heard, one after another, their own mother tongues being spoken, they were thunderstruck. They couldn't for the life of them figure out what was going on, and kept saying, "Aren't these all Galileans? How come we're hearing them talk in our various mother tongues?"

Parthians, Medes, and Elamites;

Visitors from Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia,

Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,

Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene;

Immigrants from Rome, both Jews and proselytes;

Even Cretans and Arabs!

"They're speaking our languages, describing God's mighty works!" ¹²Their heads were spinning; they couldn't make head or tail of any of it. They talked back and forth, confused: "What's going on here?" ¹³Others joked, "They're drunk on cheap wine."

That's when Peter stood up and, backed by the other eleven, spoke out with bold urgency: "Fellow Jews, all of you who are visiting Jerusalem, listen carefully and get this story straight. These people aren't drunk as some of you suspect. They haven't had time to get drunk—it's only nine o'clock in the morning. This is what the prophet Joel announced would happen:

"In the Last Days," God says, "I will pour out my Spirit
on every kind of people:
Your sons will prophesy, also your daughters;
Your young men will see visions, your old men dream dreams.
When the time comes, I'll pour out my Spirit
On those who serve me, men and women both, and they'll prophesy.
I'll set wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below,
Blood and fire and billowing smoke, the sun turning black
and the moon blood-red,
Before the Day of the Lord arrives,
the Day tremendous and marvelous;
And whoever calls out for help to me, God, will be saved."

What happens when the message of Jesus takes hold of people?

Since Easter, we've been sharing stories of transformation; hearing how God is at work to change people to be more loving and grace-filled, more giving and forgiving. We've heard biblical stories of transformation - stories of doubting Thomas, Paul's encounter on the Damascus road which both blinded him and gave him vision, Tabitha's new chance at life, Peter's vision of an open community, Lydia's experience of being part of God's family, and a slave girl set free.

We've heard stories of transformation from members and friends of First Christian Church - a Muslim woman uncovering her head to help a Christian woman losing her hair from cancer; a member who, in her grief received a word from God about what she had to give; another member whose family had been estranged coming together and healing the wounds as their loved one was passing from this world to the next; a prisoner who discovered another way of living that was truly worth living; and people without hope finding it because of Christ working through those around them.

In these times when most people in this country say they are spiritual, but not religious, it is important that we who are both know what a difference it makes that we are part of the living, breathing transforming body of Christ, together seeking to participate with God in answering the prayer of Jesus that God's kingdom come and God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Our story this morning is a witness of God's power and what happens when the gathered people of God experience that power. The power of God takes people from

complacent or huddled to excited and charged up to share God's power and love beyond themselves. The story of Pentecost is the story of the followers of Jesus being transformed from still to stirred.

In the first Star Wars film - the one that came out in the late 1970's (which is actually Episode IV) - Luke Skywalker learns about "the force". Obe-wan, a Jedi master, encourages Luke to "feel the force," and Luke begins his training to be able to use the power of "the force" for good, to help and to save people. Han Solo, meanwhile, says he doesn't believe in hokey religions and superstitions. He only believes in his own wits to take care of himself. Now Han Solo has pretty good wits, but they don't hold a candle to the power of "the force" as he later discovers. The power of "the force" transformed Luke from being stuck, settling for a life of little consequence and unable to use his full potential, to a life of action for the greater good, developing his gifts and insights along the way. Through the power of "the force" Luke and others were able to bring people together and offer hope both for the moment and the future.

When I was in seminary, I remember being amazed by how many Star Wars fans there were among the ministry candidates. I think it's because the idea of "the force" kind of taps into the deep truth of Pentecost. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon all who gathered, no matter where they came from, and the power of that Spirit was energizing and great! The power of God allowed people to receive the message of God's love in a way they could understand, each "in their own language." The power of God allowed people to see each other as one, without the divisions that usually cause conflict. The power of God animated this group of people and made them far greater than any individual. And the power of God united, and then sent the people out because a God of love and grace; a God who sent Jesus to show us how to live cannot be kept still. It empowers people to act; to share; to include others; to make a difference. The power of the Holy Spirit brought the church to life and continues to enliven it in each generation as it ignites our imaginations and causes us to prophecy and to have visions and to dream dreams; to develop our gifts and use them

for God's greater purposes. The Holy Spirit continues to unite us today and helps us to take the faith we have received and animate it so that others can hear it in a way that makes sense to them - "in their own language."

In a moment a person will come forward to make their confession of faith and be baptized. Once they come up from the water I will pray that the Holy Spirit fill them and grant them wisdom, vision, and power as they join us in following the way of Jesus. Instead of saying, "May the force be with you," we can say to them and to one another, "The Holy Spirit be at work in you to do far more than you dare ask or imagine, keeping you in the knowledge of Christ's love, too wonderful to be measured." We are on a journey of faith together. May the Holy Spirit come with power to stir us, equip us, send us, and use us. Amen.