

WHISPERS OF THE SPIRIT

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Sitting at lunch with a friend she shared her story of leading worship; of preaching from Isaiah with homeless and indigent men and women – about the hot coal danger of encountering holy things. She's an experienced worship leader who knows the good life is not wrapped up in the things of this world but in the life changing reception of God's good gifts. The words my friend spoke at the table were these,

"These are holy things for holy people; so come you holy ones, come and receive, for behold all things are made ready, and Christ himself invites you. So come to the table," she said, "Come and touch the danger. Come and be changed by it."

When she issued the invitation to the Lord's Supper at our More Than A Meal worship service, one man came stumbling from the front pew to stand facing her. When he arrived at the table, before the prayer of Great Thanksgiving, he asked her,

"What do I do now? Do I kneel?"

She nodded as she said, "Let us pray."

He fell to his knees as another gentleman joined him, kneeling at the table. Her amen concluded the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving and the words of institution were spoken, "This is Christ's body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." During which, as if on cue, the stumbling man looked at his gentle friend, threw his arm around his shoulders and spit out these words over the neatly sliced bread cubes and purple filled plastic cups,

"I love you, Man. I love you."

Holy places are usually grounded in love, though sometimes the rawness of that love burns.

I meet with a group of women weekly. We are mostly stay-at-home mothers balancing part time jobs. We listen to one another's dreams and ponder sacrifice and grace. We begin by checking in with one another – sharing about where we've been since we last gathered. We hear about one another's children and husbands – sometimes gripe about extended family or reveal tender heartfelt reflections. One day I shared that I sensed movement – that felt holy, but frightening.

Sharing was about vocational discernment. I shared that I was at a juncture of considering further study or reentering the pastorate full time which could mean relocation, disorientation, and the loss of the weekly support group. I treasure and trust each relationship with the women in this group; these women are important to me and it's frightening to think about it coming to an end. One member turned, looked at me intensely and said,

"Anne, if you leave who will teach me how to pray? Like how you garden, I need you to teach me, starting at the beginning."

Her response wasn't what I'd expected. I responded to her statement by wiggling and inarticulately growling back at her, dismissing the holy nested and burning in her request with a jagged, "Let's move on, I can't talk about this and *really*, anyone can pray."

I was a total weirdo in that moment – these are my good friends. I've gone back to that conversation and rewind and replayed it several times. What I know is that God first inspires us – to any action – service, fellowship and, for me especially, prayer. We don't visit tired inmates in the jail; serve the Lord's meal with the homeless; or extend hands in prayer unless the gifted grace of Divine mercy has moved within us. When the Holy Spirit reveals the gifts of God's loving kindness we are inspired to reach out beyond ourselves, to respond with an indescribable trust.

Somewhere along the line, I learned about receiving God's love and compassion, listening for God intuitive depth and extending it through prayer. When I'm aching, insecure, lonely and afraid and when I have enough self awareness, my first instinct is to turn to prayer. When I am hopeful, at peace, and feeling grateful I sometimes celebrate with lightness of step, a swirl in the kitchen which occasionally leads to words of gratitude before God in thanksgiving. As Hebrews suggests, we are God's house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope."

All my friend asked me to do was be present in teaching her to pray. Something moved in me that day that's been brooding since– something that I needed help to figure out. Rummaging through ancient liturgy a few years back, so I could teach a lesson on church history, I came across the words, "Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi." Literally, "We pray. We believe." In the ancient liturgy it is used as the Eucharist is being prepared, "We worship so we believe. We believe so we worship."

I guess I'm learning to recognize that I need a bit of the confidence of the stumbling man who heard and intimately knew the holy found at the Lord's Table – so much so, he moved forward, fell on his knees in a posture of gratitude and spoke loudly of God's love. That's what it means to hold firm to the confidence and the

pride that belong to hope. That's a part of what it means to pray and to believe, to believe and to pray. As my other friend said in worship, which with God's action brought postures of gratitude and holy and burning love,

"Come. Taste and see. The Lord is good."

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