

Acts 2: 1-4 & 12-21

MSMC Annual Assembly Reflections

August 24, 2008, FCMF # 1

***"Crash Helmets, Geese
and the Power of the Holy Spirit"***

This morning I'd like to reflect a bit on the MSMC annual meeting held earlier this month at the Boulder Mennonite Church. Now, I really like our conference. By this I mean the people who make up the conference, and, well, the meetings we have are pretty good too. The past two annual meetings that I have attended have been inspirational times of worship as well as good fellowship! The motto of MSMC is... "Pursuing God's dreams, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the way of Jesus Christ."

Last year the conference's theme was "Pursuing God's Dream." This year's theme was, "By the Power of the Holy Spirit!" And so, I'm guessing that next year's theme will be, "In the Way of Jesus Christ." The highlights for me were the four worship services that incorporated powerful words, singing, and imagery detailing various aspects of the Spirit's work. Now Mennonites typically do not talk much about the Holy Spirit. I don't know if we're scared or insecure or if it's because we're so focused on discipleship? Either way we are a bit uncomfortable, and this weekend was a nice way to begin taking seriously that part of the Trinity we often forget, forget at our own peril I think. Since I can't share it all with you I will reflect on just two of the messages.

The first comes from the Friday evening meditation which was entitled “Gushing Fountains of Endless Life.” In this meditation, Marilyn Miller directed our attention to the image of flowing water as a symbol for the Spirit. “Jesus,” she said, “must have been aware of the powerful image of water for in John 7:37 we read, ‘Anyone who’s thirsty must come to me and drink. The one who believes in me- as scripture puts it- will be the source of rivers of life-giving water.’” (he was talking about the spirit that those who believed in him were about to receive...)” (Scholar’s) And in John 4:13, Jesus says to the woman at the well, ‘The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life.’” (The Message)

Marilyn also reminded us that we experience the Spirit in a variety of ways, sometimes its energy gushing up like a fountain for a project, some experience the Spirit as a “still small voice.” She mentioned her friend who has the gift of healing who experiences a tingling in her fingers. I know folks who have felt the Spirit’s presence so intensely that they have been knocked physically to the ground. I’m sure some of us are aware of folks who begin to speak in strange languages when filled with the Holy Spirit. Perhaps a “burning in our hearts” similar to the travelers going to Emmaus is an indication of the Holy Spirit’s presence.

In addition to encouraging us to become more aware of how we experience the Holy Spirit, Marilyn also charged us to be sure we test that it is truly the Holy Spirit. Her criteria: “Does it lead to the gifts of the Spirit which Gal. 5:22 lists as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? A second test is- - Does this urge or passion that I have continue God’s creative work in the world?”

But my favorite and last part that I will share from her meditation (and this is why I asked you all to bring helmets in this morning) was a quote she shared from Annie Dillard that too often describes how most modern Christians fail to understand the power of the Spirit. Here's the quote, "Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry set mixing up a batch of TNT... It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats or velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews!"

Marilyn left us with these questions, "Wouldn't there be a gushing forth of more life if we connected more fully with God's Spirit? What keeps us from harnessing into the Spirit's power? Could it be that we don't ask for the Spirit's presence in our lives?"

The other meditation I want to share a bit from was written by Rich Williams (also of the Boulder Menno Church). Rich claims to have "looked through the Bible and encountered the word 'spirit' 606 times and the concept many more times. There were evil spirits, jealous spirits and the Spirit of God that moved in people." Additionally, "these occasions of the spirit seemed to be connected with the most important events of the Bible." His conclusion, "that humans are beings of the spirit. Just as fish are beings of the water, birds are beings of the air - humans appear to be beings of the spirit and sometimes, just like fish are unaware of the water around them we are unaware of the Spirit moving within and around us."

He illustrated this point by talking about geese. As we know, each fall flocks of Canada geese migrate south. When the time is right (which they instinctively know), they begin a nearly 600 mile journey and then the following spring they will retrace this course going north. But geese are among the heaviest of flying birds and no single goose alone can fly 600 miles. To fly any distance at all geese MUST fly with others. By flying in that famous “V” formation, each goose can conserve energy by “drafting” behind the goose flying in front of them. The hardest flying occurs only at the “point” of the V. And since no single goose can fly the point for the entire journey the geese take turns. Each goose will take a turn flying in the lead and the duration of their turn is in proportion to their strength. The stronger geese fly longer at the “point” than those who are younger or weaker. In this way the stronger help the weaker to complete the flight, and if one goose is too sick to continue and must land a stronger goose goes with them, so that together both can finish the journey.

We also know that geese honk, a loud if not irritating sound to us. However, to the goose, it is a sound of encouragement! Honking helps the other geese to fly harder, fly longer and stay together which makes the journey easier. So when you hear the honking this fall remember what they’re saying, “Keep it up!” “Stay together!” “Looking good!”

So, in the end Rich asks, “What might we learn from geese?” Well, one is that we too cannot make it on our own! We cannot make this journey of life alone and so we should invite others to “fly” with us, to make the journey both easier and safer. Maybe creating community should be our priority? Forming communities in which we look out for each other, care for each other and take care of those who are tired or weak. We need

to create communities in which we each take turns doing the hard work -- leading in accordance with our strength, skills and gifts and making sure that each of us, strong and weak, young and old, wise and foolish finish the journey safely. Hmm, that sure sounds good to me!

There is so much more I could say, even from just these two services. But I will leave you this morning with the challenge Karen Cox, pastor of the Boulder Mennonite Church, left us with during the final service Sunday morning. Her challenge was in the form of a couple simple questions; “Are you ready?” and “Do you really want it?” Really are we, are we ready? and do we really want that kind of Power? You see these folks we read about in Acts this morning I think are kind of scared, they are filled with uncertainty. You see they don’t really know what’s happening. And Peter, he’s a lot of help, talking about prophesy, visions and dreams (by women and slaves no less!), and promising more, more fire, smoke, blood red moons and stars falling from the sky! I don’t know about you but I’d be just a bit unnerved, feeling a little vulnerable and in need a little protective gear. The kind of stuff where crash helmets just might come in handy. The beginning of journey which I know I cannot make on my own, but for which a community is gathering to make the journey easier. A journey to some great and glorious day, a journey with friends that, as Marilyn Miller put it, is filled with, “Gushing Fountains of Endless Life”