

## *Nourishment for the Journey*

### *Ruminations on Acts 1.1-9*

The author of Luke-Acts writes to the friends of God (i.e., Theophilus) first about Jesus' teachings and doings, but then about those of his disciples and followers. In the first book, the Gospel of Luke, we see Jesus as one who is filled with the Holy Spirit. In the second book, we will see the Holy Spirit enter into his followers, and the acts which they do both before and after the Spirit dwells within them. The commonality is that the Holy Spirit is with both Jesus and his disciples. Jesus is not the only one who possesses its power, and in both cases the Holy Spirit leads them to create a more just, peaceful, and loving community among those who follow in God's ways.

And it is that mission which we may identify with that of the Holy Spirit: the mission to create an egalitarian society where everyone is treated equitably, where all are seen as created in the image of God and having equal worth to one another, where the power and domination systems of human empires are replaced with the virtue and service systems of the kingdom of heaven on earth, and that this kingdom is to spread and exist worldwide for all peoples and creatures.

In essence, the Holy Spirit leads us back to that state of grace and being formerly called Eden in Genesis; to help us to live with one another as God originally intended us to do so – with everyone looking out for and helping one another, with the foraging and sharing of the bounty of the earth with one another, with not being ashamed of our nudity or our lack of desire to conquer the world and others, and for letting love for one another in peaceful and just relationships be more important to us than gaining knowledge, position, prestige, and control over others and the world. The Holy Spirit, therefore, is one that leads us to accept the blessings of God that accrue for everyone rather than trying to create our own blessings that accrue only for ourselves and not others.

It is this Holy Spirit that we are to be baptized with; baptism being a way of saying that our character and spirit are transformed from one value system to another – from human values that are egocentric, to divine values that are communally-oriented. To be baptized with the Holy Spirit means we stop looking out for ourselves and those closest to us, or most like us, and start looking out for everyone and everything that God has created. In other words, it is to make ourselves into the good stewards and caretakers of all people and all creation; as God called us to do in making us.

Jesus, in his post-resurrection appearances, speaks of the same mission for the disciples to carry out that he had spoken pre-resurrection. He was revered for this mission by his disciples and followers, but they had assumed that the Holy Spirit which was directing him was unique to him. Here, the author makes clear to all who will listen that the same Holy Spirit that was in Jesus can be in us, also. Indeed, this is the "good news" that Jesus has always preached – that the Holy Spirit can live in all of us if we just are willing to transform our value systems to accord with the values of the Spirit.

Jesus promises his followers that they, too, will be transformed (i.e., baptized) with the Holy Spirit in a time not too long from now. All of the things we revered Jesus for will also be available for us. And it is in this Acts of the Apostles that we see that this promise was fulfilled, and can still be fulfilled for all who follow in Jesus' ways. The Holy Spirit will arrive to the disciples at Pentecost. They will have their own spirits transformed at that time.

But, in this passage, the Holy Spirit has not arrived; and we see the evidence of this by the same sort of confused questioning that Jesus' disciples asked of him pre-resurrection. They ask him: "*When will you restore the kingdom to Israel?*" The question misunderstands Jesus' mission in two ways.

First, it assumes that it for Jesus, not them, to carry on the mission. They expect Jesus to make it happen for them all, rather than them working together to make it happen for everyone. They are looking for

Jesus to be their savior, not their muse and inspiration. They want him to act like a king, like a Caesar, and not to delegate to them the work of making the world a more just, peaceful, and loving place. They don't see the value of their own efforts, but see all of the effort and work being done by God. They misunderstand that it is not a top-down model that Jesus is advocating, but rather an egalitarian model in which everyone is to play an equitable role in accordance with their own gifts, talents, and abilities.

Second, it assumes that the restoration to Eden is to happen only for Israel, not the whole world. They are still of the thinking that life is a contestation; a game of winners and losers, dominators and the dominated, oppressors and the oppressed. They still think of life as a zero sum event in which the victors take all of the spoils and the vanquished are left with barely enough in which to subsist. They are still immersed in the mythology of human empires, not God's kingdom. It is the same idea perpetuated by fascist, authoritarian, and capitalist countries still today.

Jesus, instead, imagines and envisions a world where we are all seeking to serve the best interests of the whole community, and consequently every individual within the community. Our goal is not to get ahead of others, but rather to ensure that no one gets ahead or falls behind. We are to be a society of equals: in worth, in the distribution of goods and services, in social status, and in every other way in which helps to create genuine justice, parity in peace, and lavishness in love. We are all to have all that we need to live and flourish – not just physically, but spiritually; not just economically, but ethically; not just individually, but socially; not just functionally, but axiologically.

In all things, we are to all be blessed with having enough without anyone having too much or too little. In this equitable state of existence, we are all to care for and help one another; not simply respecting one another, but earnestly seeking the best welfare of each and every one. Just as the disciples had a hard time discerning parables like the Good Samaritan who helped his enemy, the Forgiving Father's love to his Prodigal Son, and the Generous giver who gave everyone the same amount of money to subsist upon regardless of how long they worked, we are to work to make everyone's needs supplied and fulfilled so that no one is deemed less and no one is deemed greater than anyone else. Unconditional love is to be meted out to everyone, not just a chosen few. It is to be a return to Eden, to paradise, to a place where harmony and happiness reigns for one and all.

Jesus tells the disciples that it is they, not he, who will receive power to continue the mission of the Holy Spirit. They are to be the witnesses to the Holy Spirit; not only in word, but in action. And they are to do this not just for Israel, or even generously to Samaria also, but *"to the ends of the earth."* And with that being made clear, Jesus is no longer a necessary presence for the disciples. He is lifted up as an example of how we are all to be. He joins the heavenly host of those who have gone before with their efforts. But now is our time. It is up to us to accomplish what they began. We are to be the continuing legacy of the Holy Spirit being made manifest in this world. We are to do our part in changing the world for good towards justice, peace, and love.

Are we ready to answer the call?

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 5/16/2023