

UNCOMPLICATED LOVE

Exodus 3: 1-6 and Acts of the Apostles 2: 1-4

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FIRE IN THE EARTH

And we know, when Moses was told,
in the way he was told,
“Take off your shoes!” He grew pale from that simple

reminder of fire in the dusty earth.
He never recovered
his complicated way of loving again

and was free to love in the same way
he felt the fire licking at his heels loved him.
As if the lion earth could roar

and take him in one moment.
Every step he took
from there was carefully placed.

Everything he said mattered as if he knew
the constant eye witness of the ground
and remembered his own face in the dust

the moment before revelation.
Since then thousands have felt
the same immobile tongue with which he tried to speak.

Like the moment you too saw, for the first time,
your own house turned to ashes.
Everything consumed so the road could open again.

Your entire presence in your eyes
and the world turning slowly
into a single branch of flame.

David Whyte

I love this poem.
For me, it's about encountering a reality infinitely greater than myself.
A reality I deem holy, sacred. Like a boundless wise heart. God's heart.
In this encounter, something is taken from me, so something else can be revealed to me.
Something there all along, but I couldn't see it, till the hindrance was removed.
I can now see it, but I can't explain how or why I see it.
That's my response to this poem.

In the book of Exodus, Moses encounters fire burning without consuming the earth.
But in Whyte's poem, the fire consumes something in Moses. The fire turns to ash his complicated way of loving.

I love that phrase—complicated way of loving.
For Moses, his complicated way of loving was a hindrance. The fire took it from him.
And revealed to him his capacity to love freely. Without complication.
To love with abandon. And with heat. The way he felt the fire loved him when it licked at his heals.

Moses has an awakening. He's suddenly aware of his capacity to love freely.
This revelation, this new-found freedom to love, changes Moses. From that moment on,
Moses walks the earth with great care, and his every word matters.

Since Moses, thousands have experienced the flame consuming them and revealing something to them. As well as the inability to describe it.

This poem taps into the spirituality of our tradition—the spirituality of transformation through the relinquishment of who we are, what we have, and what we do, in order to experience who we are, what we have, and what we do in a new way.

For Jesus, this is how we enter into, or begin living, the kingdom of God. It's how we're born again. It's how we experience death and resurrection, while still physically alive.

In Whyte's poem, tongues of fire lick Moses' feet. In the Pentecost story in Acts, tongues as of fire rest upon each person.

Reading the Pentecost story, with Whyte's poem in mind, I like to think that each person encountered the holy, sacred reality, all together, in that moment.

And in that encounter, touched by that fire, something within each person was consumed, some hindrance was removed, so something else could be revealed to each person.

And what was taken, what turned to ash, was their complicated way of loving.

What was revealed, what they realized, was their capacity to love freely.

To love with abandon. With heat. The way they felt the fire loving them when it rested upon them.

The fire removed from their hearts and minds whatever hindered their love, and it freed them to love freely.

For me, that's one of the lessons of Pentecost.

And part of Pentecost spirituality.

Pentecost isn't just a day, it's a spiritual process, one that removes from our hearts and minds whatever complicates our way of loving, in order to free us up to love more freely.

Throughout the Bible, we encounter diverse groups of people, living all around the Mediterranean Sea and throughout the Middle East, people whose love for one another is very complicated.

Complicated by nationality, ethnicity, religion, power, custom, prejudice, power, distrust, age-old disputes, fear.

But what we see at work in the book of Acts is a spiritual process in which people in the world of the Mediterranean and Middle East are touched by the Holy Spirit in ways that begin to un-complicate their love for one another, thereby freeing them to love one another more freely.

The attitudes and prejudices that complicate people's love for one another, that are hindrances to their love for one another, begin to turn to ash, and people feel freer to love one another.

The identity markers, cultural cues, and status symbols by which people judge one another, determine their superiority or inferiority vis-a-vis one another, accept or reject one another, begin to turn to ash, and people feel freer to love another.

That, in part, is how the early church grew and spread north, south, east, and west.

In communities of people called the church, more and more people began to feel the complicating hindrances to their love for one another disappear, and they felt freer to love one another more freely.

The church grew and spread by incorporating more and more people into the Body of Christ, bringing together people who, until then, would not have sat at the same table, shared the same loaf of bread, or drank from the same cup of wine.

The church grew and spread by bringing together people who, until then, would not have passed the peace to one another.

By bringing together people who, until then, would not have prayed with one another, or for one another.

People who, until then, would not have shared their possessions with one another.

But now they did. They gathered in communities where they ate from the same table, passed a spirit of peace between themselves, prayed with and for each other, and shared what they had with one another.

And this more uncomplicated way of loving brought them joy.

And they thanked God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit for bringing them together.

And they marveled at the love that brought them together. Some even said, God is love.

What complicates our love for another? And for others we encounter in our lives?

You knew that question was coming. I always turn the stories back on us.

What in our hearts and minds—in our feelings for one another, our thoughts about one another—hinders our love for another? And for others we encounter in our lives?

What are our prejudices, our biases? How do we measure other people, judge other people, rank other people, include or exclude other people?

These are powerful questions to ask ourselves, and to answer with as much insight and honesty as possible. Powerful questions to incorporate into our spiritual practice.

We can also incorporate into our spiritual practice an openness and receptivity to encounters with the holy, the sacred. Encounters that take from us the hindrances that complicate our way of loving, and reveal to us our capacity to love more freely.