

Prophecy and reconciliation

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I am amazed by how the Holy Spirit is at work actualizing Jesus' work of breaking down the "barrier of the dividing wall" (Eph 1:14) through the gift of prophecy. Prophetic words bridge divides between God and humans, the past and present, believers and unbelievers, people of diverse ethnicities, nationalities, theological traditions, political ideologies, bringing reconciliation amidst every imaginable difference. God is at work reconciling the world to himself, gathering his children into a united family in Christ.

And why should I be surprised? Early in John's Gospel it is written that those who receive Jesus and believe in his name are given authority to become God's children who are "born of God" (1:12-13). Intimacy with God is a lifelong process that grows as we learn to hear the Father's voice, see what God is doing, become transformed by his compassion and engage in Jesus-like actions. Jesus says:

Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself, unless it is something he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all things that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel (John 5:19-20). (See also Jn 5:30; 8:28; 12:49).

As we become more aware of our identity as God's beloved sons and daughters, the Father will inevitably seek to reconcile us with estranged siblings. Friendship with God will also lead us into friendship with God's many friends, including sinners, bringing us across every imaginable wall of separation as the Father makes us one as Jesus (John 17). Intimacy with God is an invitation into Jesus' way of discerning his ministry of reconciliation.

For most of my Christian life I was estranged from the body of Christ charismatic. Years of ministry among the poor in war-torn Central America and among undocumented immigrants and inmates in labor camps and a jail in the United States put me at odds with my government and with many evangelicals and charismatic Christians who supported its wars and laws. I was inspired by Jesus' life and teachings in the Gospels, the desert

fathers, liberation theology and people like Dorothy Day, Archbishop Romero, Jean Vanier, and Mother Theresa. I pursued academic study of Scripture, contemplative spiritual practices and sought to combat the roots of poverty and oppression through contextual Bible study, sustainable development and human rights advocacy.

Week after week over a ten-year period I counseled inmates and immigrants in crisis and led bilingual bible studies in our local jail and storefront at Tierra Nueva in Washington State. I saw firsthand how harsh laws and immigration policies, poverty, drugs and alcohol destroy people's lives. I became increasingly discontented with the gospel I was sharing, and longed to see more of God's power to bring transformation. My desperation for breakthrough in ministry became so great that I ventured across the line into an ecumenism broader than I'd ever considered--attending a pastors' and leaders' conference at the infamous Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship.

I was struck from the start how much the Holy Spirit was moving during a session on the importance of forgiveness. As the speaker taught and prayed vivid memories came to mind of offenses and judgments held against people in my distant past who I felt compelled to forgive. After another stirring session on Jesus' ministry announcing the Kingdom of God I lined up to receive prayer with hundreds of others for greater fruitfulness in ministry, and soon had my turn before a young man from the UK on the ministry team. His words opened me up as he spoke what only God could have shown him:

"I see you in a circle of men in red uniforms, I think they are prisoners," he started out, getting my rapt attention. "The Father is saying 'I am delighted how you love my prisoners and I'm going to give you deeper revelation from the Bible that will make their hearts burn,' he continued, moving me with this reference to my favorite picture from the Emmaus road story in Luke 24:13ff before a final unexpected clincher. "He is releasing an anointing for healing on you so your words will be confirmed with the signs that follow." I fell to the ground overcome by the Spirit, my hands burning. I continued to be touched more and more by the Holy Spirit at that conference in ways that transformed my life and ministry.

Since that time God has used me to invite many others from diverse camps in the body of Christ across lines of division to receive from each other.

Over the past six years I have learned to identify the Spirit's promptings to pray for people in ways that show me Jesus' longing to reconcile people.

Once after a Bible study on Jesus' healing of the bent-over woman in Luke 13:10ff a Chicano gangster named Santos asked if I would pray for him for lifelong nervous tick that caused his face to dramatically flinch several times a minute. Upon praying I got an impression that he had been beaten in the head by his father as a child. When I asked him he nodded and began to weep. After leading him through prayers of forgiveness of his father his humiliating tick went away and he gave his life fully to Jesus. A Chinese woman in London was healed of chronic back pain and insomnia last April after she forgave her father for beating her, her siblings and mother after the Holy Spirit revealed this prophetically. While I have seen God heal hundreds of people over these years in many nations and subcultures, what most touches people is the recognition that God personally knows, loves and welcomes them into his family and offers the Holy Spirit to bear witness that they are indeed his children (Rom 8:15-17).

The Spirit that came on Jesus at his baptism, which his followers received at Pentecost inducts us into filial intimacy and membership in God's borderless family. The tongues of fire that rested on each one gathered ignited their tongues to proclaim the mighty deeds across the boundaries of language and culture. Peter's use of Joel 2 to interpret the coming of the Spirit re-enforces this notion of the prophetic as barrier removing: sons and daughters, young and old, female and male slaves all will prophesy (Acts 3:17-18). An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, directing him to go to the road to Gaza where he met an Ethiopian eunuch who came to faith and carried the gospel into Africa (Acts 8:26ff). Peter received prophetic revelation in the form of a vision that opened him to minister to Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10). As we grow in intimate communion with God we will find ourselves bringing Good News across borders that show that in fact the dividing wall of hostility is down and "[we] are no longer strangers and aliens, but [we] are fellow citizens with the saints and are of God's household" (Eph 2:19).