The Active, Disruptive Spirit

Narrative Lectionary

September 1, 2019

Acts 2: 1-18 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Matthew 28: 17-20

This year for Skylight Festival of Arts, Faith and Justice, we secured hip hop performer Shad, who had also been host of CBC’s arts and culture program Q. He was considered to be a good fit for the festival as a rap artist who did not fit the rap culture, as one committed to justice and faith. It was a risk to bring him, costing almost one third of our program budget. We decided to take the risk even though he could only be there Friday night. Come Friday night we began with a young Six Nations artist, James Wilson, followed by Jonathan Brooks, a pastor from Chicago who is also a hip hop artist. His performance included some faith based hip-hop and some important history of rap that set up for Shad really well. We also were blessed to have a group of nine Kenyans from the Kenyan Alliance for the Advancement of Children’s Rights, a Mission and Service supported organization. Six of these folk were young adults who had been supported by the organization as children and now were working with them. They had researched Shad and learned that he was born in Kenya, indeed one of them was born in the same town as Shad. So there was quite the energy when Shad performed. Many in the crowd, including the Kenyans moved to the front and were dancing with the music. There was a moment when he named Kenya and being Kenyan in a lyric and the crowd, especially the group of Kenyans went wild. In that moment it felt like a convergence of everything coming together that night in a spiritual way. It was a powerful, emotional moment for me, that we could not have planned, and it felt so much bigger than us. In that moment, I felt the Spirit at work and God’s presence in, with, and through us all. It wasn’t quite tongues of fire, but it felt pretty powerful.

On the day of Pentecost the followers of Jesus were gathered and experienced something powerful as they were filled with the Spirit. They spoke in languages that everyone could understand and Peter invoked the words of the prophet Joel, characterizing the community as a community of prophets, of all ages, genders, races, as ones who will dream, dreams and see visions. We know that this experience disrupted their lives, which the Spirit can do. Otherwise they may have gone back to their lives as fishermen, but now they were empowered to do much bigger things, much more in sharing the Good News with the world. Have you ever felt like God, the Spirit has disrupted your life? Those times when there is something bigger driving you or leading you to do something? Working with Skylight has been like that for me. It feels like we are involved with something bigger than ourselves and anytime I wonder whether I should continue as the only westerner on the team, the sense of the power of the Spirit active in what we are working on, has always won. It has meant some isolation in wanting the event to be national and trying to get folk to come from beyond Ontario. The Spirit moving through us can be like that but knowing God is with us can help us through these spiritual disruptions in life.

This fall, here at Eastside, we will continue to engage in the work of how we are being called to live out our vision, the mission God is calling us to. As we examine our Faith Story, the work of our needs assessment and its recommendations, we will need to dream and vision and discern. We will need to be open to exploring what God is calling us to keep doing and what we need to let go of to be able to focus on what will be important for our ongoing ministry together as a community of Eastside in the Living Spirit Centre, in the community, and with other churches in Regina. It may be important for us to keep dreaming because as Matthew Skinner, preacher and New Testament Professor at Luther Seminary says: “when a community of faith quits dreaming dreams, it has little to offer either its members or the wider world”. We will need to discern how we continue to engage with the neighbourhood. Popular preacher and commentary contributor, David Lose challenges congregations when he writes:

Our congregations will not discover themselves until they give themselves away. No amount of time spent on developing a mission statement or devising new member campaigns can substitute for looking around one's neighborhood and asking, "Who needs us?" and "What can we do with our resources to bear God's love to this part of the world?"

The followers of Jesus found themselves asking these kinds of questions following the infusing of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This spring we found out a school who needs us, and this summer we received funding from the United Church’s Embracing the Spirit fund for a lunch program with Glen Elm School. Each Monday they will bring a few older youth to work with Munch Café here, to make lunches for those in the school who do not have a lunch. They will also be learning how to make nutritious lunches. This will be a shared ministry between the three congregations as we look for a few lay people from each congregation to help one Monday a month. Is this the kind of ministry you, we are being called to? This is a partnership that evolved out of a request for breakfast food and the conversations that followed. I have experienced the Spirit moving in the development of this ministry in the way it has come together, and the connections made. It probably would not have happened if Melanie, the principal did not know me. The connection with Munch Café who operate out of our space is an exciting connection and expansion of our ministry together.

As we move through this fall of working through the Faith Story recommendations, Eastside’s work and ministry will be one of seeking the balance between being inward looking and addressing our own spiritual needs, and being outward looking, such that we can do ministry in our communities, both here as part of the church and in our daily lives where we are. Does it feel like God, the Spirit is disrupting your life? Is this a time when there is something bigger driving us or leading us to do something? How do we as a group discern what changes we need to make?How might we consider those who are not here but will be here in the future and those who may move on? How do we be open to each other to discern these things together? How can we be open to the Spirit creating a convergence beyond our plans and imaginings like happened for us at Skylight?

As we move through this time may we do so, living out our vision and have Open Hearts, and Open Minds, as we continue to welcome all through our Open Doors. May we be open to the ways the Spirit may disrupt our lives, our community as we discern our way forward. May we see the Spirit active in our lives and our community, knowing that we are not alone.