

HolySpiritMyLife

Several weeks ago we heard Pastor Shawn Lange speak of the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. One that he mentioned was that the Holy Spirit convicts us. We may or may not appreciate that aspect of the H.S., associating conviction with sinfulness.

My experience of the Holy Spirit has been that of conviction with two distinct sides: 1.) The side that convicts me of wrong doing and sin, and the need to turn around, and change my direction to God's way.

2.) There is another understanding of the word, "to convict", meaning to know of a certainty, as in "this is my conviction," and I must ACT, or SPEAK UP for a right cause, for my sake or the sake of another. To stand up for civil rights, The Poor People's Campaign, Palestine, Doctrine of Discovery, or the Tolson Center. Recently I heard Jason Shank explain that a fellow Quaker Friend told him, "I know when the Spirit is wanting/convicting me to SPEAK, because I feel this lump in my chest that has to come out."

There have been times in my life, in my childhood and teenage years that I was sitting in evangelistic meetings and I felt a kind of burning lump in my chest that made me stand up and "go forward," to the front of the church to commit, or recommit my life to following Jesus. These were stepping stones in to a deepening conviction that following Jesus was a "Get on your feet and go" WAY, not an idea or conviction, but a direction the Holy Spirit was calling me to GO. I felt called to go as a missionary.

When I was 14 preparing for baptism, we teens were asked to choose a Bible verse to share with the congregation. I felt directed to the Beatitudes, "Blessed are you when they shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you for my sake, falsely, for so they persecuted the prophets who went before you. I struggled, thinking this was a strange verse to choose, but I felt convicted that this was my verse.

Within 9 months my mother passed away, and I felt the Holy Spirit convicting me to choose the hard road to GO seek a new circle of friends, those my mother would have approved of. In my following two high school years, making a long story short, God guided me through false accusations and persecution by my dad and his new wife, till the truth brought that marriage to an end, and began the healing of my relationship to my Dad. Camp Friedenswald and several staff people became my haven of peace.

A few years later in college, 60 years ago, Keith and I began our relationship. Seven years later we were making the difficult decisions to give our hearts, and minds, and possessions to following Jesus with this little group that came to be Fellowship of Hope. We were convicted by the Holy Spirit to make this step of Faith. And as a result, “Indeed, were we not spoken of falsely by family and friends?” In those years we sought the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Nothing outstanding happened to us.

But SPIRIT WAS AT WORK, QUIETLY IN MY LIFE.

I am thankful that Spiritual Directors and Keith have often been the agent of the Holy Spirit to me, to CONVICT me of my critical thoughts or actions, and my need to change my direction. And I need a lot of conversion, turning around, and repentance.

On the other hand, many times I have felt CONVICTED by the Holy Spirit with a need to act, saying, “I need to do, or I have to do this or that .” And Keith would ask, “Why do you HAVE to do that?”

Over the years, I have COME TO BELIEVE that when someone comes to mind, and stays with me, it is usually the Holy Spirit nudging me, convicting me to get in touch with that person. It becomes an URGENCY, a MUST. And when I make contact, I often find out there was a particular need present. And if I don’t make contact, I learn from another person that there was a need.

Here are two examples that stand out to me of Spirit nudging me.

When we were helping two indigenous pastors lead a Bible study in a little mud and stick church in Argentina, on the second day, we were stuck about a mile away in a house, unable to go by car because it was raining and the road was very muddy. We sat about 6 of us in the one room, listening to the rain on the tin roof, and watching the rain filled patio. The pastors kept saying, "No one will be at the church. We will just wait till tomorrow."

I began to feel this urgency that we needed to go walking to the church, and suggested this. But who was I, one woman, contesting the pastors and those who know the muddy path and the people far better than myself. When a break came in the rain, after two and a half hours of sitting there, I finally decided I would not ask THEM to go, but offer to walk there myself. When I got up and stated my desire, the pastors said, "If she is going, we will go with her."

When we arrived at the church, a woman sat alone in the one space where water was not dripping through the roof. I recognized her from the little study the day before. She had been waiting for nearly two hours for us to arrive. Her story went something like this. "Yesterday, when you told the story of the woman at the well, I knew that woman was me. I came to find Jesus today. I want to be reconciled to the church." And so on that day she made a new and difficult decision. Later the one pastor told us how he had recently found her lying drunken along the road at night. It was a great joy to see her praising and dancing in the church services when we later visited there. I sensed that the Spirit of the Good Shepherd had confirmed the CALL TO GO that I had felt.

In this past year I have been soaking in, over and over, four CD's by Richard Rohr, called "The Divine Dance." I know I've mentioned this in various settings. It describes God's poured out love to Jesus the Son, and Jesus joyfully receiving that parental love. But the giving and receiving is not complete until the child returns the love, and that is the Gift of the Holy Spirit to keep the Divine Dance moving. "Don't stop the flow" is Richard Roher's plea. Stopping the Spirit's flow of God's love for us to the other is what sin is about!" I am convicted of the ways I stop the flow of love.

Last fall at our Fellowship retreat at Camp Friedenswald, Lois Engleman and I were sitting almost at the end of the dock going into the lake, when I noticed a small kayak drifting toward the pier, with, in my judgemental opinion what looked like a disheveled man slumped over as though sleeping in the slightly tilted boat. Immediately Richard Rohr's words convicted me, that I should see Jesus in every person as God sees them and not stop the flow of love. So I began to pray for this sleeping Jesus in the boat, that God would protect him from tipping into the lake!

He drifted out of our sight. Then suddenly there was a banging behind us, on the other side of the pier to our backs. Turning this young man was climbing up the ladder behind us, asking us "Where am I? I got lost?" Not wanting to be disturbed on this peaceful lake, I felt the Spirit's words. "Don't stop the flow!"

Freddy and his family were at an Air B&B on Lake Shavehead. He had many questions about this Mennonite campground called "Peaceful Woods." I told him I had been coming here since my teenage years nearly 60 years ago. Our conversation became lively. "WOW," he kept exclaiming. He was Italian Catholic, and attended church only occasionally, so I urged him to find a group of Catholic young people seeking God. He lived in Cicero, near Chicago, where Keith and I had marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, in the mid 60s. "WOW, I never met anyone who marched in that march!" My spirit was bubbling with joy, and I knew the Spirit was flowing between us!

It was supper time for Lois and me, but Freddy asked if he could just wander around this Peaceful Woods. Through the next week my heart was warm and joyful as I thought of encountering Jesus in the boat in this young man Freddy.

Thank you Jesus for the ways you are nudging and convicting me, so Spirit can flow through "Jesus who lives in me, out to Jesus who dwells in you and others around us."

Thanks be to God

Gretchen