Solidarity and the Spirit

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Text: John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

In 1956, Frantz Fanon – a black psychiatrist – resigned from his position at the French hospital which was located in Algeria. During his time, Algeria was a colony of France and an important one too. However, his tenure at the hospital coincided with Algeria's fight for decolonization and independence from France. In his role as a psychiatrist, he tended to French soldiers who had committed awful atrocities and to Algerian and Muslim victims of torture. Algeria was engaged in a bloody fight of resistance against colonization, a fight for their autonomy and their dignity, and Fanon could not bear being complicit in France’s brutal occupation through his role at the hospital.

Frantz Fanon was neither Algerian, nor Arab, nor Muslim. He was born and raised in another French colony, Martinique. Much of his childhood and youth was spent on that island, but he undertook his doctoral studies and early practice as a psychiatrist in France. As a black Caribbean man in French society, he quickly learned how white people in French society viewed black people. He also learned how black people had no choice but to navigate that gaze in order to survive. He wrote about this dynamic and about the psychological effects of colonization on the colonized. He eventually worked as a psychiatrist in a French hospital in Algeria as he tended to wounded after wounded – victims and perpetrators, those who were innocent and those who were guilty.

However, his conscience could not allow him to continue working in that context. He courageously resigned from the hospital, and he became an active member of the National Liberation Front – the party fighting for Algeria’s independence. Thereafter, he wrote prolifically about decolonization, he oversaw publications, and he traveled extensively as an ambassador for the National Liberation Front to other African nations. His books, especially my favorite, *The Wretched of the Earth*, have been essential reading across the African diaspora and the broader global south among those working for liberation from colonial power. Though Fanon was neither Algerian, Arab, nor Muslim, he was in *solidarity* with their suffering, their resistance, and their dreams. And It’s the meaning of *solidarity* that I ask us to consider this Pentecost Sunday.

In the Gospel of John, the writer portrays Jesus with his disciples the night before his arrest. Speaking of the Holy Spirit – whom Jesus calls the Advocate – he says:

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

The Spirit will take what is Jesus’s and declare it to us. The Spirit will make it known to us. This passage is speaking about more than just facts, data, or propositional statements. The Spirit will take what is proper to Jesus and reveal them to us – reveal them so we can know them intimately, so we can know the things of Jesus in our blood and in our bones. This is the work of the Spirit – to draw us into communion with Jesus and, through Jesus, into communion with God the Creator. The Spirit brings us into a communion that’s rich, vital, and intimate. In fact, this reminds me of Paul’s famous Trinitarian salutation signing off his second letter to the Corinthians stating, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”

The Holy Spirit is a spirit of communion: it draws us together without destroying our differences, it connects without melting, it binds together while maintaining freedom. Nearly 2000 years after the life of Jesus, if this Gospel passage is to have any meaning, it indicates that our communion with Jesus transcends thousands of years, thousands of miles, different languages, and different contexts. Our connection with Jesus is not just because of history, tradition, or institutions, or even the words on these pages but because of receptive faith and the communion made possible by the Spirit. The Spirit takes what belongs to Jesus and shares it with us despite the gulf that separates us from his earthly ministry. Without this work of the Spirit, there would be no Christ, no Gospel, no Church, and no faith. Jesus states, that “[the Spirit] will take what is mine and declare it to you.” If the Spirit did not enable people to receive the message and life of Jesus – to enter into communion with Jesus – there would be no Gospel at all.

This communion with Jesus is nothing less than solidarity with Jesus. Communion is solidarity and solidarity is communion, especially with those who suffer. The communion of the Holy Spirit is the solidarity of the Holy Spirit. What else is solidarity than a form of communion? My friends, the Spirit allows us to share in the life of Christ, and through Christ with God, each other, and all of creation. But what does solidarity mean? What is entailed in the solidarity?

Jesus states, that “[the Spirit] will take what is mine and declare it to you.” The Spirit will take what is proper to Jesus and make it known to us; that is, share it with us, weave it into our own lives. The Spirit will entangle and knot our lives with Christ. We are incorporated into the love between Jesus and God the Creator, by being incorporated into the life, suffering, betrayal, crucifixion, and hope of resurrection. Despite distances and time, despite our difference languages and contexts, the Spirit takes what is Jesus’s and makes it ours. The Spirit binds our fate with the fate of Christ so that we too will participate in the love, work, wisdom, suffering, courage, fight, and joy that marked the life of Jesus.

Holy solidarity means finding our lives entangled with Christ, with each other, and with creation. The life of Frantz Fanon enacted this holy solidarity when he found his life entangled with the colonized people of Algeria. Though he was Caribbean born and educated in France, he could not ignore the pain of those around him or the violence wielded by France. At first it plagued his mind and his heart as he tended to French soldiers, Algerian victims, and children. He tried but he could not in good conscience continue to work in a French hospital on the side of the colonizer while the Algerians fought for their independence. The suffering of the Algerians was made known to Fanon – not just in mind, but in heart and soul. He was led to communion with the Algerians in their fight against colonization – to abandon his post, to learn more about their struggles, and to share in their efforts. Fanon tied his fate to the fate of the oppressed people of Algeria. My friends, this is holy solidarity, this is holy communion, this is the work of the Holy Spirit.

However, there is no easy solidarity; and I also recall the brilliant Christian mystic and activist Simone Weil. Her steadfast solidarity with workers, the unemployed, and those who struggled was unparalleled. Her contemporary, Albert Camus, called her “the only great spirit of our time.” From a young age, she held deep concern for advancing the cause of the oppressed and standing against institutional violence. Though more of an academic by training, her devotion to the actual experience of the working class moved her to quit her job and took a job on an assembly line in a factory for a year. She struggled to keep up, but she wanted so badly to experience in her own flesh and pocket, the pain and poverty endured by workers. In 1936, she joined the Spanish Civil War fighting against the fascists. However, her near-sightedness and clumsiness made her ill-suited for combat. Many were hesitant to entrust her with artillery, and she was eventually sent home after injuring herself.

I recall the clumsiness, failures, and losses of Simone because it reminds us that solidarity comes with imperfections, errors, missteps, risks, and setbacks. Even when we take on the pain and struggles of others, solidarity requires constant learning, allowing ourselves to fail, and sometimes finding our limits. The Spirit allows us to share in the lives of each other – not as something to appropriate for our own gain, but with grace, with openness to learning and being changed, with the courage to error, and with resolve to continue with a vision for tomorrow.

Today, the Spirit continues to foster communion – that is, solidarity – with Christ and, through Christ, with all others. This communion crosses borders and defies the boundaries of gender. This solidarity mocks national ties and undermines economic interests. The Spirit extends beyond species – opening us to the pain and the hope of the earth, the landscapes, and the lives that inhabit them. This is a pneumatology for today – that the Spirit is making known to all of us the lives of one another. The Spirit is revealing us to each other. The Spirit is binding our fate with the oppressed, the exploited, and the ravaged earth. Like Christ, we are bound to one another in our suffering and in our hope! Most recently, I see the Spirit at work forging communion between US-based students and Palestinians – despite innumerable differences. This is a bond that the media, politicians, and billionaires fought against, but the work of the Spirit made it possible and gives it life. It’s the work of the Spirit that revealed to the students in encampments the suffering, the resistance, and the hopes of Palestinians as they live and die under colonial powers. It’s the Spirit that empowers us to share in the life, struggle, and hope of people – even those we’ve never met – not to profit from it, not to lead it, and with no guarantee of perfection (we will make mistakes).

And this communion, this solidarity happens in our faith communities. We sing together, we worship together, but we also pray together and for one another. We open our lives to each other – illnesses, losses, struggles, anniversaries, achievements, and more. The Spirit weaves us together in a tapestry that is united with the suffering and hope of Christ. And by recommitting yourselves to each other today as some of you will be doing, you're opening yourselves once again to the work of the Spirit. you're opening yourselves to be woven together.

Pentecost is when the Spirit weaves our story with the story of Christ. And, through Christ, with God, with each other, with those who suffer, and with the world. This is a new creation being born among us by the Spirit.

Amen.

Hallelujah.