

When the Holy Spirit Danced With Me in My Kitchen

the first thing I noticed was his arms,
thick and hairy like a bricklayer's
with a tattoo of an anchor
as Churchill had.

'Coming for a spin?' he grinned,
in an accent more Geordie than Galilee,
and he whirled me
through tango, foxtrot and waltz
without missing a beat.

'You're good,' I said. 'Thanks,'
he said, taking two glasses to the tap.
'You're not so bad yourself,
for someone with no sense of rhythm
and two left feet.'
He gave me a wink.

'It's all in the waist.
The movement has to start there
or it's dead.'

'You'll find it applies to most things,'
he went on, grabbing the kettle.
'Writing, cooking, kissing,
all the things you're good at,
or think you are.'
He winked again.

'You don't mind me asking,' I said,

'but why are you here?'

'I thought it was about time,'

he said. 'I mean, you've been full stretch,
haven't you, what with your job,
feeling like a taxi for the kids,
your family living far away,
and you 'in your head' all the time
as you said to someone last week.'

I looked at him and nodded.

'Go on.'

'I was going to.'

He got down some mugs.
'Let's say I was concerned about you.
The thing is, the three of us,
we like you a lot.
We think you've got real potential
as a human. You're kind and humorous.
You're also a little scatty.
We like that. By the way, that fish curry
you made on Saturday was first class.'

'You know about that?'
'Everything you get up to,'
he smiled. 'It's nothing to panic about.
Really. To tell you the truth
you could do with loosening up a little.
Try not beating yourself up the whole time.
A little less rushing everywhere
would do you good, too.'

'I thought you might say that.'

'Look at me,' he said.

'I came to say:
Keep Going, and Relax.
Also: keep things simple.
If you are doing one thing,
do that thing. If you are talking
with someone, listen to them,
do not blame them for being hard work.
Write as if you were not afraid,
and love in this way too.
Be patient with everyone, especially
your relations, who (I can assure you)
think you are rather special.
Make big decisions slowly, and small decisions
fast. Do not make bitterness your friend.
Pray (I will not mind if you use
made up words for this.)
Garrison was right: 'Why
have good things you don't use?'
What you have been given to do,
give yourself to it completely,
only by emptying yourself can you become full.'

Anthony Wilson

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The most important thing about this poem is that the title flows straight into the first line. It takes you straight into the action of the poem without really explaining what is going on or where the action is taking place. The reader has to accept at face value that the Holy Spirit is present in a kitchen and that it is dancing. There is no asterisk by the poem's title to take you to a bit of blurb at the foot of the page, as you would find on a plaque next to a painting in a gallery.

Writers call this way of starting a piece of writing '*in media res*', which is Latin for 'in the middle of things'. You might like to think of other favourite poems or novels or plays or films which begin in this way, right in the middle of what is most important at that moment.

The implication of this is both serious and playful. It is serious because it dares the reader to imagine that God's presence may be real and available to us in any given situation, however unlikely, or 'unpoetic', even a kitchen. It is playful because it implicitly asks where you might also find God, or discover that God is available to you. (I went to a festival once, and discovered that God was available right behind some blackout drapes which were either side of a giant screen showing some dolphins playing underwater.)

If you wanted, you could turn this into a little writing exercise. Take a sheet of paper and draw two lines down the page to give you three columns of equal width. In the first column you can write down the names you have for God (e.g. Father, Jesus, Emmanuel, etc.), or qualities that you associate with him (justice, peace, forgiveness, etc.). In column two you write down a list of verbs. Don't think too hard about this. For maximum effect they should be active (e.g. jump, run, carry, etc.). In the third column write down some locations that you find yourself in every day (bedroom, car, bus to school, etc.). Again, don't think too hard about this.

To begin writing you need to select a word or phrase from each column and put them next to each other in the same sentence (e.g. 'When Justice Carried Me In the School Bus Last Friday'). This becomes your first line. The point of the writing is to *discover* what happens while you write the poem or story. What does Justice say to you? What do you say back? Why were you being carried? Was that important? Above all, the results should be surprising, as if the Holy Spirit tapped you on the shoulder in your kitchen and asked you: 'Coming for a spin?'

Anthony Wilson
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