

# A Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On

by Mary Parmer

*Now I become myself. It's taken time, many years and places,  
I have been dissolved and shaken, worn other people's faces...*

May Sarton's poem speaks to my spiritual journey of discerning giftedness, and hence, my vocation. Years ago I could not have imagined nor predicted God's hand would move in a mysterious way through painful life circumstances, taking me on a life-affirming journey of self-awareness and transformative clarity, then utilizing my giftedness in a life-giving vocation.

The word vocation is rooted in the Latin vocare, "voice" or "to call," and it essentially means the work a person is called to by God. Episcopal priest Sam Portaro contends that vocation is not a thing once-delivered, but a gradual, lifelong waiting and a perpetual receiving. Our path to discernment of our call leads both backward and forward. Imagining not only who we are now and what we are called to do but also examining where we have come from will help us make sense of our calling.

Given that many of us find our sense of self through a transformational journey, my story is not a unique one. My journey from darkness into light began after reaching an emotional bottom shortly after my divorce. I heard once that sometimes we turn to God when our foundations are shaking only to find out that it is God who is shaking them. Scarcely able to articulate it at the time, my wounded soul cried out for healing and transformation. As a business owner actively engaged in the community, my outward appearance of normalcy decried my interior being, which was consumed with an inordinate amount of fear, anger and resentment.

Two subsequent years of inner therapeutic work brought God's grace of healing and forgiveness into my life, and one late summer evening I found myself asking, "What is God calling me to do for the rest of my life? What is my next step? Who is God calling me to be?" Pondering these questions, what I knew to be true was that God was calling me to bear witness to the spiritual, soulful healing I had experienced. I had a deep intuitive sense God was calling me into ministry, to what or where I had no clue.

Through a grace-filled invitation and loving welcome, I entered the Episcopal Church and was confirmed in 1996 at

St. Stephen's, Beaumont. Shortly thereafter in a Community of Hope class, I experienced an epiphany around my particular spiritual gifts. Given by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, spiritual gifts enabled early believers to function as the Body of Christ within their community and the world. Although a plethora of spiritual gifts are listed in Scripture, our COH inventory covered only the motivational spiritual gifts in Romans 12:6-8 (prophecy, serving, teaching, exhortation, giving, administration, mercy).

My primary spiritual gift is exhortation, defined as "the ability to encourage others to grow emotionally and spiritually, even in the face of hardship and suffering." The epiphany came as I recalled that a Southern Baptist inventory 15 years prior to this had resulted in the same primary gift, yet I was asked to teach ninth grade girls! Feeling like a miserable failure, I maneuvered to get out of teaching the class as quickly as possible. Serving on the staff of St. Stephen's for ten years following this new insight, I lived into the "God's cheerleader in the church" description of an exhorter, and my secondary gifts of mercy and administration were a blessing.

We are called to live into the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the unique giftedness given to each of us. Richard Rohr's compelling new book, *Falling Upward*, emphasizes this point, "All we can give back and all God wants from any of us is to humbly and proudly return the product that we have been given—which is ourselves!" Discovering my spiritual giftedness became a pivotal moment in my faith journey. It was the beginning of God calling me to be the authentic woman God created me to be, rather than conforming to someone else's image of me.

You have been given gifts that are needed by the world around you, and my encouragement to you is to pray for God's guidance in discernment of your gifts and calling. Trust the process unfolding in your life, and above all, "trust in the slow work of God..."

*Parmer is director of the Gathering of Leaders and a consultant for the diocesan Newcomer Ministry Project.*