

Finding your firstlight

by Heidi Martin

As a new columnist for *timbrel*, allow me to introduce myself. I am a freelance writer from Strasburg, PA where we are famous for Sight and Sound Theatre, the Strasburg Rail Road and wet bottom shoofly pie. In fact, Strasburg is saturated with saturated fat and other sweet temptations in which I enjoy indulging, which is also why I picked up the habit of riding bike (er...pedal bike, not a motorcycle!) over our rolling hills and between cornfields.

I wanted to major in minors at Bluffton University for I love to learn but, in the end, I nestled down in the fields of wellness, writing and English literature. At least this way, I could pick up any book on any particular subject but still consider myself “studying” or “doing homework” because, well, I was reading, wasn’t I?

Needless to say, my heart is often stirred when I read—perhaps stirred with discouragement or anger, but, more often, with sweetness and hope. I desire to share a few of these “stirrings” with you, for as Sue Monk Kidd said, “Humans, I discovered, need stories the way we need air.”

Monk Kidd’s book, *Firstlight* is where we shall begin as we consider the prophetic voice of women in the church.

The idea of the prophetic is often a foreboding subject as it is correlated with futuristic foreshadowing and predictions, but American author and minister John Robert Lucas describes the prophetic as simply hearing the voice of God and acting upon it. This definition unveils a few points of the prophetic worth considering. I draw these points from Monk Kidd’s inspirational writing found specifically in *Firstlight*.

First, the prophetic voice of women is often found in simple, everyday living for this is where God speaks. Life is full of dishes and laundry, mowing lawn and washing floors but God speaks within these menial tasks. In the chapter titled “Letting Go,” Monk Kidd describes the first time she let her son ride bike to school. “It was a small thing, letting him make his own way to school, so small, one might wonder why I would even chronicle it. My answer

is because sometimes you can glimpse the essence of something in a tiny fragment of it—like seeing the oak in the acorn or the ocean in a wave.” Sometimes the small, everyday is the profound.

Part of everyday living—and a great challenge—is to hold the attitude of “undivided consciousness,” meaning when one is eating, eat and when one is washing windows, wash windows. In other words, be where you are. Monk Kidd extends this to relationships. “Mindful availability would say: When you sit with a crying woman on a train, just sit with her. Do it with all your mind and heart and soul...Such deep availability requires a hospitality that receives people as they are...you are simply there with your heart flung open.”

Though the prophetic involves everyday life, it also propels us forward. Sometimes to move forward, we must go back. In fact, Monk Kidd believes it is necessary to go back, to reflect and to discover what first caused each heart to open and be filled with hope. In fact, that is the purpose of *Firstlight*. It is a collection of Monk Kidd’s first writings which she has come to embrace with all its weaknesses and strengths. Still, there is also a time to move forward—to move into the present once again and perhaps beyond that. Monk Kidd says, “I think about the unceasing migrations of the human heart. How we move not only from house to house, but from one phase of life to another.... The saving grace in these moments is our willingness to leave the old—taking the cherished lessons and experiences with us and embracing the new with acceptance and grace.”

The hope Monk Kidd offers is that all of us are in this journey of living in the everyday, of reaching back and of moving forward. She adds that all of us (and I would add, all of us who walk with Jesus) have “firstlight” within us. That is, we have God’s presence with all God’s whispers of acorns and majesty of oaks.

Consider reading other books by Sue Monk Kidd or, for a similar voice, read *The Cloister Walk* by Kathleen Norris. You won’t be disappointed. ❏