

October 7, 2018

Born That Way: Origin Stories

First Reading ~ *Acts 2:1-21*

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they all met in one room. Suddenly, they heard what sounded like a violent, rushing wind from heaven; the noise filled the entire house in which they were sitting. Something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each one. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other languages, as Spirit enabled them. Now there were devout people living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, and at this sound they all assembled. But they were bewildered to hear their native languages being spoken. They were amazed and astonished: "Surely all of these people speaking are not Galileans! How does it happen that each of us hears these words in our native tongue? We are Parthians, Medes and Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya around Cyrene, as well as visitors from Rome — all Jews, or converts to Judaism — Cretans and Arabs, too; we hear them preaching, each in our own language, about the marvels of God!" All were amazed and disturbed. They asked each other, "What does this mean?" But others said mockingly, "They've drunk too much new wine." Then Peter stood up with the Eleven and addressed the crowd, "Women and men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem! Listen to what I have to say! These people are not drunk as you think — it's only nine o'clock in the morning! No, it's what Joel the prophet spoke of: 'In the days to come — it is Our God who speaks — I will pour out my Spirit on all humankind. Your daughters and sons will prophesy, your young people will see visions, and your elders will dream dreams. Even on the most insignificant of my people, both women and men, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. And I will display wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below: blood, fire and billowing smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon will become blood before the coming of the great and sublime day of Our God. And all who call upon the name of Our God will be saved.'"

Second Reading ~ *adapted from Robin Rosenberg in "The Psychology Behind Superhero Origin Stories: How does Following the Adventures of Batman and Wonder Woman Inspire Us to Cope With Adversity?"*

In my surveys of the genre, I've found that superheroes undergo three types of life-altering experiences that we can relate to.

The first is trauma, which lies at the heart of Batman's origin story, in which Bruce Wayne dedicates himself to fighting crime after seeing his parents

murdered. In real life, many people experience “stress-induced growth” after a trauma and resolve to help others, even becoming social activists.

The second life-altering force is destiny. Consider *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, about a normal teenager who discovers she’s the “Chosen One”—endowed with supernatural powers to fight demons. Buffy is reluctant to accept her destiny, yet she throws herself into her new job. Many of us identify with Buffy’s challenge (minus the vampires) of assuming a great responsibility that compels her to grow up sooner than she wants to.

Lastly, there’s sheer chance, a spider bite, which transformed Peter into Spider-Man. Later, while Spider-Man was going for glory, his beloved Uncle was robbed and murdered by a street thief. Peter was directly responsible for his own great emotional pain. Yet he manages to rise about that and make something of it. Spider-Man’s heroism is an example of how random adverse events cause many of us to take stock of our lives and choose a different path.

At their best, superhero origin stories inspire us and provide models of coping with adversity, finding meaning in loss and trauma, discovering our strengths and using them for good purposes. Wearing a cape or tights, however, is optional.

