

Celebrating the Living Word
Acts 2:1-4; John 20:19-23; 1 Corinthians 12:4-13

I spent the past few days at AMBS at a conference on the Holy Spirit. The conference was titled, (Un)Holy Mix: The Holy Spirit in Movements and Institutions. Four professors brought their projects to this working conference where they gathered with a small group for collaboration—for conversations and exchange about their projects. And chaos ensued! Energizing, creative, hard, clarifying, revealing, un-doing, instructive, lifegiving chaos. Unholy chaos. A holy conference.

In the last plenary session someone observed that conference participants came speaking different languages.... And yet we understood each other. If it sounds like Pentecost, it is my testimony that it *was* an experience of Pentecost.

So...what made it Pentecost? I can't be certain. But my guess is that it had everything to do with the intention and process of the conference itself. It was evident that the Spirit was at work with the planners as they prepared a place for us. So when we participants entered the space, the Spirit was already blowing and breathing.

Another thing that contributed to the experience of Pentecost was the persons who brought their projects. I was part of Jamie Pitts' working group. This professor, working in the academy, *gave* his professional project to us, to the eight assorted people who made up his group. Actually, he *gifted* his project. In the Spirit of Collaboration, trusting the resurrecting power of the Holy Spirit, Jamie released his project.

And we took it. We examined it, holding it up, turning it upside down and inside out. We asked if he had thought about this and why he had done that. We told him he should think about adding this here and taking away that there. And Jamie kept listening and receiving, sometimes explaining, sometimes asking questions, but always grateful, open, and receptive.

The theological engagement in the group was great. And Jamie has a really good book in the works! But what I found more remarkable was the Holy, Spirited Collaboration. As a collective, we were renewed and revived. We had experienced an aliveness that we knew and named as the Life of the Spirit.

I am left with a very real sense of the Spirit as *Collaboration*. Around the table, everyone contributed, *gifting* their contributions to each other and to the project. Because the space had been prepared, we were free to give—to gift without attachment or expectation or judgment about how or if our gifts would be used. We gave, expecting the Holy Spirit of Collaboration to use what we offered. And She did. From the chaos of it all, Jamie got his project back...now animated by the Spirit. Because Jamie had been willing to give it away, to release it to others, what was returned to him was much richer and deeper and sharper and more beautiful than had he kept it to himself.

This experience of collaboration has been shaping how I hear the Pentecost stories in Acts and Corinthians. And I can hear and appreciate in a new way the *gifting* that Pentecost is, how profoundly our God is a collaborating and gifting God. In the incarnation, God *gifts* us with physical, bodied presence. And we see the Spirit of Collaboration at work in Jesus. But God's desire to collaborate with us doesn't end with Jesus. Jesus ascends so that the Holy Spirit can be given...a gift that makes it possible for all bodies to be collaborators!

Which leads to a second noticing. It strikes me that we/I tend to think of Pentecost as a personal experience. But that isn't the story that either John or Luke tell. In John, the disciples, as a collective, receive the Spirit. And in Acts, the entire house is filled. The Spirit descends on the crowd. Of course it was individual bodies who received the Spirit, but they did so as *collectives*, as a bodied community. And as a collective body, a collective that had

been breathed into by the Holy Spirit of Collaboration, they were able to be and do more than they ever could have been or done as individual bodies.

Acts and Corinthians make this collective being and doing sound like an easy, straightforward project. But from experience we know this isn't so! The beauty of community comes with chaos and pain and time.

Through the lens of my experience at the AMBS conference, and with the testimonies of resurrection during the Easter season, I noticed this verse in Acts 4:33 (NRSV): "With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all."

In the middle of a description about collective living is this verse about the resurrection. The testimony of the apostles wasn't the outcome of collective living in the Spirit, the testimony was resurrection! Resurrection is the center of the collective body.

To say that resurrection is the center is to say that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Eternal Life, the Spirit of Holy Collaboration is at the center. It was and it is the power of the Holy Spirit that received all the events of Holy Week. Jesus, powered by the Spirit, received the betrayals, the accusations, the judgments...all of it. The Holy Spirit received it all...and after three days returned Jesus to the disciples, recognizable, but now a body unbound by time and place.

And of course I've also been thinking about our own gift economy process. Paul makes the naming and distribution of gifts sound so easy, so obvious. That hasn't been our experience. I confess that I've been somewhat discouraged by the chaos of it. The outcome isn't how or what I imagined.

So I'm grateful that today is Pentecost! I'm grateful for the very real experience of the Holy Spirit breathing life in a collective body. So my attention has moved from my

attachments and expectations and judgments about the outcome of our collective process.

And instead find myself smiling, anticipating what the Holy Spirit will give back to us.

May we give our gifts freely...releasing them to each other...to the life and power of the Spirit....

May we open ourselves to each others' gifts...receiving with gratitude and grace...trusting that the Holy Spirit of Collaboration is receiving it all...using it all...and will return to us something richer and more beautiful than we could have imagined.

And may our lives and our words always be a testimony to the resurrection of Jesus...to the life and life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.