

Come Together -- Epiphany 3A

The divine may come to life in individuals, may reveal itself in individual people; but it attains its earthly fullness only where, having awakened to an awareness of their universal being, individual beings open themselves to one another, disclose themselves to one another, help one another; where immediacy is established between one human being and another; where the sublime stronghold of the individual is unbolted and one person breaks free to meet another. Where this takes place, the eternal arises in the Between. The seemingly empty space, that place of actualization is community, and true community is that relationship in which the Divine comes to its actualization between human beings. (Martin Buber—*On Judaism*)

This making room for the divine phenomenon of relationship is our universal vocation. Sometimes we feel more excited about it than others. Sometimes we just want to head for the hills, or down an empty stretch of beach or highway for a while to be by ourselves. But there is always the sense that, one way or another, we can be useful, we can participate somehow in lessening the isolation and pain in the world by encountering others.

“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light,” declared Isaiah, “Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death— upon them has the light shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; for the yoke of their burden you have broken. The shadow of death is meaninglessness and isolation; the great light is mutuality. The burden is unshared pain, the yoke, isolation: when our cries go unanswered. Our joy is increased when

the numbers of people we consider to be true friends increases, and when the spaces of the world we consider safe, welcoming and free to move around in grows.

Life can be scary. This is a week when the majority of Americans would agree. When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he got outta Dodge – in this case Galilee. He made his home in Capernaum by the Sea to participate in a community, a place where his pain could be shared and his cries answered.

But he also had a plan. The prophecy of Isaiah had a greater meaning for Jesus than mere analgesia for his own grief over cousin John's brutal fate in Herod's house of horrors. Jesus knew he had work to accomplish. He also knew that it was work that by definition could not be accomplished alone, because it was the work of community -- the sharing of joy, the hearing of each other's cries, the breaking of burdens and healing of divisions – and so he had to have an organization.

“As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, casting a net into the sea and said, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Straightway they left their nets and followed him. He saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father mending their nets, and he called them too. Straightway they left their boat and their father, and followed Jesus.” This is most certainly not a call to abandon one's parents, but a statement of the truth: there are sacrifices to be made, comfort zones to be expanded, even left behind, paradigms to be shifted, habits to be broken,

systems to be overhauled, if the light is to shine on everybody. That is the nature of the Kingdom of God.

Our commission too is to go out and make disciples for good. Go out and encounter one another one-on-one, with the assumption, not the certain knowledge that we are both God's children, that whatever the balance or imbalance of our worldly power and resources, we have common interests. We are to listen and engage carefully and consistently enough to discover those common interests and build friendships, alliances, enterprises on the foundations of mutual self-interest with the materials of benevolent power.

We are not bidden to curl up, count our blessings, close our eyes and hope nobody bothers us. Chaos returns when everyone is expected to count on their own luck. Those of us who can must engage with and organize those who cannot. This is politics as the way of Christ. If we fish for each other, we can feed the world.

Paul wrote: "Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me that there are quarrels among you, that you say, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Cephas." Or 'I'm a Conservative,' 'I'm a Liberal.' 'I'm a Democrat,' 'You're a Republican.' Friday we saw where that kind of thinking has led us. "Has Christ been divided?" asks Paul, "Was I crucified for you, or were you baptized in the name of Peter?" The only way to thrive is to organize. Belong to the big organization. The head of the

organization is the organization: the Body of Christ. I must not act in the name of me, but of us. Struggles for superiority, significance and heroic dominance by so-called leaders have led to most of the troubles we have ever had. Think of how much greater it would be if we were to compete for the facility to enable others to thrive.

This week, as much or more than any other, we could use a taste of Martin King's poetic, not to say symphonic spiritual wisdom. Martin King, as in *The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Junior*, his title in our title-crazed society. Here, from his talk to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in August, 1967:

“Let us go out with a divine dissatisfaction. Let us be dissatisfied until America will no longer have a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds. Let us be dissatisfied until the tragic walls that separate the outer city of wealth and comfort for the few from the inner city of poverty and despair for the many shall be crushed by the battering rams of the forces of justice. Let us be dissatisfied until slums are cast into the junk heaps of history, and every family is living in a decent sanitary home. Let us be dissatisfied until integration is not seen as a problem but as an opportunity to participate in the beauty of diversity. Let us be dissatisfied until women and men will be judged on the content of their character, not on the color of their skin. Let us be dissatisfied.

“Let us be dissatisfied until every state capitol houses a governor who will do justly, who will love mercy and who will walk humbly with his God. Let us be dissatisfied until that day when nobody will shout White Power! —when

nobody will shout Black Power!— but everybody will talk about God’s power and human power,” end quote. Half a year later, he, like Jesus, would be killed for presenting such challenges to pride and power.

Zimzum is a term from the Jewish Kabbalah for the moment immediately preceding Creation, when God withdrew enough power from a particular space to make room for the World. The most creative act is one that makes room for others. The sparks of divine energy that remain trapped in shards of the broken vessels of the world must now be gathered. It is our task to gather them, so the world can be repaired.

Martin King concluded, “The road ahead will not always be smooth. There will be still rocky places of frustration and meandering points of bewilderment. There will be inevitable setbacks. There will be moments when the buoyancy of hope will give way to the fatigue of despair. Our dreams will sometimes seem shattered and our ethereal hopes blasted. Difficult and painful as it is, we must walk on in the days ahead with an audacious faith in the future.”