

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing
and rightdoing there is a field.
I'll meet you there.

Rumi (1207- 1293)



DROPS OF UNITY AT A TIME OF DISCORD

“Divide and Rule” was a political strategy designed by Philip of Macedonia (383 BCE – 336 BCE) and it is pretty much the guiding principle in Washington, DC in our own time. So it is, for me at least, refreshing to stumble upon something more harmonious and nourishing from time to time. The Islamic, Jewish and Christian heritages have a delightful convergence in these opening days of June. It's likely we have something to learn from each of them.



The holy month of Ramadan concluded on Tuesday with the joyful **Eid al-Fitr**. It has always seemed to me that this festival is much more than people

gathering for a wonderful meal after a month of fasting. I think it celebrates the understanding of community. That would have been especially important for people if they were living near the deserts of the earth. During this festival people pray together, they renew their relationships with friends and family, they visit the graves of those who have gone before them. But the thing that most impresses me is that an important part of the festival is providing for the poor. The emphasis is on understanding that we are connected to each other. We need one another. We must respect one another and care for each other. Rips in the cloak of community have been repaired. Let us now try to live in a better way.



Surely for all of us, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, there must be a way of finding some spiritual oases in the political desert in which we currently are wandering.



The followers of Jesus of Nazareth have been stumbling along behind him trying to walk in his way — his Tao. The Romans had murdered Jesus so what were his followers to do? This Sunday is the feast of **Pentecost** when Scripture tells us that the friends and family of Jesus met in a room and *“they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven”* (Acts 2:2). I have always been fascinated by that wind. It brought us one of the most important Christian mantras *Veni Sancti Spiritus* — Come Holy Spirit. But it can be argued that the Spirit is already here in each of us.

Once the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist master and peace activist, Thich Nhat Hanh (1926 –) asked a Catholic priest to explain the Holy Spirit. The priest responded that it meant “energy sent from God.” Thich later wrote that this

made him happy because it indicated that the safest way to approach the concept of God was “through the door of the Holy Spirit.” To him this was equivalent to the Buddhist concept of “mindfulness.” He wrote that he told the priest, *“all of us have the seed of the Holy Spirit in us, the capacity of healing, transforming and loving.”*

How wonderful it would be if we were to replace the agenda of the televised political debates with a respectful curiosity about how the seed of the Holy Spirit had been growing in each of the candidates.



In my day, every Catholic child was asked by a stern catechism teacher to recite the “Gifts of the Holy Spirit.” That comes from the passage in the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 11:2). And the gifts are: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, fortitude, counsel, piety, fear of the Lord. Leaving aside the last one which really doesn't

mean what it seems to say, those are certainly gifts which we need in abundance in these troubling times.

There is a feeling of a fresh and new beginning in this Pentecost festival. When our children at Starcross were younger, we all made origami cranes and put them around the chapel. It is said that the Holy Spirit appeared with Jesus in the form of a dove when he was in the Jordan River at the beginning of his ministry. We blended this with the story of a child suffering from radiation sickness as a result of the atomic bomb the United States dropped on Hiroshima in 1945. She believed if she could make 1000 origami cranes she could heal herself and repair the world. She died before she made 1000 but friends took up her task and in some places it is still going on. Sometimes the seed of the Holy Spirit looks a lot like an origami crane.



The Jewish festival of **Shavuot** begins on Saturday and continues through Monday. Originally it was a time when people brought the first fruits of their harvest to the Temple in Jerusalem. This gradually changed for two reasons. First the Romans destroyed most of the Temple. Second, in time the majority of Jewish communities were more urban than rural. However, when I was visiting a kibbutz near the Golan Heights, my enthusiastic teenage guide said that they collected the fruits of the harvest. “And”, she said twirling around, “there is a lot of dancing!” This is one of the times at Starcross we display our fruits and vegetables in the chapel — but sadly we have no dancing!

During Shavuot, some Jews study the Torah, a practice which began in the 16th century with the mystics at Safed. This is also a time when dairy foods are popular especially cheesecakes — a practice I heartily endorse!



Traditionally the Book of Ruth from the Hebrew Bible is read. This is one of my favorite books of Scripture. During a great famine a Jewish family from Bethlehem, Elimelech and his wife Naomi with their two sons, traveled to the nearby country of Moab in order to survive. Their two sons married Moabite women — Mahlon married Ruth and Chilion married Orpah. In a few years Elimelech and his two sons died. Naomi realize that her daughters-in-law were still young and she urged them to return to their own mothers and to remarry. Orpah reluctantly did so. But Ruth uttered these famous and wonderful words (Ruth1:16),

*Wherever you go, I will go,
wherever you live, I will live.
Your people shall be my people,
and your God, my God.
Wherever you die, I will die.*

Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley and wheat harvests and Ruth went into the fields to glean. She worked in a field that belonged to Boaz. He was very kind to Ruth because he had heard of her loyalty to her mother-in-law. One thing led to another. Ruth and Boaz were married and had a son named Obed, who in turn had a son named Jesse who was the father of David. Therefore Ruth, the immigrant, was the great-grandmother of the most famous King in Jewish history. There is perhaps another modern lesson to be learned here. Ruth was a Palestinian Arab!



Well, take your pick of stories and festivals. The spiritual stars seem to be aligned at the moment!

Brother Toby