

Texts: Hebrews 12:19-28 & Luke 13:10-17

Title: An invitation into creativity and renewal.

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Creativity and Renewal.

Just south of our border, in all of the social and political complexity, two faith communities are inviting people into creativity and renewal.

First, members of The Simple Way, an intentional neighborhood-based community in North Philadelphia, founded by Shane Claiborne are traveling around the United States, are literally melting guns into garden tools.

Christians are encouraged to Bring their guns to church - lay them on the altar and melt them down. So, they come with a gun, they leave with a plow.

Shane Claiborne comments: “there’s something that happens at the forge that goes beyond words. It moves the heart to see folks from different faiths, from different backgrounds, that come and take the same hammer and beat a piece of metal that was designed to kill into a piece of metal that is designed to cultivate life”.

(Sourced from : <https://onbeing.org/programs/shane-claiborne-and-omar-saif-ghobash-called-and-conflicted/#transcript>)

Second, Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie lives in New York City, and he is founding spiritual leader of the Storahelling Project (Lab Shul) - a ‘pop-up synagogue’ for people of all ages. They are catering to generations who are seeking spiritual meaning and who are a little burnt out and tired by religious cliché.

He asked himself one day, why is it that when Jewish people are in the pews for an hour on Saturdays, they’re just being chanted to in Hebrew – a language they don’t understand, it’s long, and it’s dire. Instead they could be invigorated by storytelling.

Through research, he discovered that the Torah service ritual is one of the oldest storytelling ceremonies, originally an educational device for sharing story and wrestling with the ways that it could be meaningful in the context of the time.

Storahelling Project, lab Shul, become a theatrical, dramatized vehicle to engage people in the Biblical text and the issues of the 21st century.

And out of this renewed place of faith, they are finding ways to respond to the complexity of life in America. Through their practice the Bible again and again reminds them: Remember the Other. Remember the Other. You were the Other.

The Friday after the last USA elections, many from this community ended up in a mosque on Friday afternoon, as they were at prayers. Together they protested, they knelt, they prayed, they meditated. "Together against hate."

(Sourced from: <https://onbeing.org/programs/amichai-lau-lavie-first-aid-for-spiritual-seekers/#transcript>)

Creativity and Renewal.

Where:

Creativity is the use of the imagination, to bring about something new; and

Renewal is the replacing or repair of something that is worn out, run-down, or broken, to make it like-new.

In our gospel today, it seems that an encounter with Jesus invited all present to repair what was worn out and broken.

- The bent woman,
- The physical structures that separated people (men from women, Gentiles from Jew) and
- The stoic Sabbath practices that missed the immediate human need.

It seems that those early followers of the way of Jesus, after an encounter with the Risen Christ, were also invited into the work of creativity and renewal.

We read today in Hebrews, a mysterious piece of writing, possibly a sermon, delivered to a community of Jewish Christians, who were tired and wrestling with the central question do we continue to follow the Jesus way or do we return to the mainstream Jewish faith?

One author imagines Hebrews as Jewish Midrash – that is the ancient Jewish art of inquiry for discovering hidden meaning in and between the lines;

Reading between the lines of sacred text to uncover deeper, hidden layers of meaning.

What a creative piece of art:

- Imagining Mount Sinai that ancient symbol of encounter with the mystery of God;
- A place of covenant – the forming of a binding relationship (God with people and people with God); and
- A place of receiving instruction – the birthing of the sacred scriptures.

We read in Deuteronomy 4:10-13

Moses instructs the people of Israel to tell their children about that day. That day when...

They approached and stood at the foot of the mountain while the mountain was blazing up to the very heavens, shrouded in dark clouds. When the Lord spoke to them out of

the fire. When they heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. When God declared to them the covenant, which God charged them to observe - the ten commandments; and God wrote them on two stone tablets.

Using the picture of that time and that place, these Jewish Christians creatively imagine the meaning for them in light of this new wisdom of Jesus.

Jesus as the new Moses transposed to a reality outside of place and time. An imaginary mountain and city – something new, flourishing – filled with life.

The Epistle to the Hebrews as a “Jesus-Midrash” by Elke Tonges in Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights Edited by Gabriella Gelardini, Society of Biblical Literature.

It seems that every encounter with Christ (God present among us) invites us into the work of Creativity and Renewal.

- The imagination needed to bring about something new – in this place and beyond; and
- Repairing something that is worn out, run-down, or broken, to make it like-new.

And friends in this work, we are fully accompanied by the transforming presence of Christ.

So when we acknowledge that something needs to change,
When we step out of that which is known
When we step into a yet-to-be-defined place and risk what might happen.

This very act of trust and surrender, is met by One who delights in breathing new life.

Taking the broken things and making them whole.
Taking what is old and worn out and repairing them like-new.

Hildegard of Bingen, a visionary Benedictine leader and song writer of the 12th century, coined the term VIRIDITAS – the greening power of God.

- That life force at work in all of creation.
- The force sustaining life each moment and bringing newness to birth.

O ignis Spiritus Paracliti (translated from the Latin by Nathaniel M. Campbell)
By Hildegard of Bingen

O fire of the Spirit and Defender,
the life of every life created:
Holy are you—giving life to every form.

Holy are you—anointing the critically
broken. Holy are you—cleansing
the festering wounds.

O breath of holiness,
O fire of love,
O taste so sweet within the breast,
that floods the heart with virtues' fragrant good.

O clearest fountain,
in which is seen the mirrored work of God:
to gather the estranged
and seek again the lost.

O living armor, hope that binds
the every limb,
O belt of honor: save the blessed.

Guard those enchained in evil's prison,
and loose the bonds of those
whose saving freedom is the forceful will of God.

O mighty course that runs within and through
the all—up in the heights, upon the earth,
and in the every depth—
you bind and gather all together.

From you the clouds flow forth, the wind takes flight,
the stones their moisture hold,
the waters rivers spring,
and earth viridity exudes.

You are the teacher of the truly learned,
whose joy you grant
through Wisdom's inspiration.

Amen.