

The GATHERING

"Do not be afraid, for I am with you, I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west"

—Isaiah 43:5-7

Gratitude for the Gatherers



Our passage from Isaiah 43 presents God as One who gathers. And I never realized, until thinking about this reflection, just how often the Divine gathers. It starts in Genesis 1 when God gathers the waters to create dry land—a gathering that makes possible our future gatherings. God gathers the people to free them from slavery. God gathers those who were scattered in exile. Jesus gathers a motley crew of followers and speaks of how he longs to gather the people together “as a hen gathers her brood under her wing” (Matthew 23:37).

I am grateful for those who gathered me into my new church community last year. (And for Brenda, cake-maker extraordinaire!)

As children of God, as followers of Jesus, we are invited to participate in this sacred work of gathering. And in this holiday season I am particularly grateful for the many gatherers who enrich my life:

- For my aunt who started the family group text (even though I am generally not a fan of group texts) to invite us all over for Thanksgiving dinner;
- For community organizers who bring people together to advocate for justice;
- For the church member who has arranged a fun small group outing;
- For the library staff who plan book clubs;
- For friends who host dinner parties;
- For the worship leaders who gather our spirits together each Sunday morning;
- For tech people who allow us to gather across distances.

From our mothers' arms to the waters of baptism to a shared meal—there is nothing quite like the feeling of being gathered in by a loving and powerful presence.

“Do not fear,” says God to the people, “I am with you. . . . I will gather you.” (Isaiah 43:5)

There is a feeling of peace, of safety, of belovedness that I experience when someone gathers me in. It is lovely when that gathering means physically sharing space with others—but physical proximity is not necessary. Mother God gathers our spirits under her holy wings. Through communion, song, liturgy, and prayer we can gather in spirit with people who are miles away.

Whether it is solemn or silly, planned or impromptu, each time we gather in love we are accepting a gift from the Divine Gatherer.

Thanks be to God. And thanks be to all the gatherers.

