

Some years back I went to France partly so I could spend time around labyrinths. I headed for Amiens which has a beautiful labyrinth on the floor of their cathedral. If I had my choice, the labyrinth I love walking the most is the one in the cathedral at Chartres BUT most of the time that one is covered with chairs to prevent people from walking it for fear of being taken over by some 'those new-agers'! The parish of Amiens, conversely, keeps theirs uncovered so visitors may enjoy the beauty of their tiled floor. So off to Amiens I head. I book three (!) nights in a small inn close to the cathedral and arrive ready to spend my days in walking meditation on the labyrinth, journaling, and inner pilgrimage. I'm full of anticipation.. Horror of horrors, when I enter the cathedral the entire labyrinth is covered with row upon row of chairs. This is a disaster! What am I to do? I need to find someone who can tell me what's going on and when the chairs will be gone. I try the bookstore/gift shop attached to the cathedral but they haven't a clue what I'm talking about.

I head back into the cathedral desperate to find answers and spot a tour guide, sitting quietly on a bench. The tour guides in France are government employees educated in the history, both political and religious, the architecture, the stained glass, etc etc of every public edifice in France. Surely he will know. Since the people in the gift shop didn't speak English I prepare myself for a repeat of that and plan what to say in French before approaching him. Then I carefully ask "When will the chairs be removed from the labyrinth because I would like to walk." I get to the word 'walk' and he solemnly shakes his head. Oops. I've used the Spanish word for 'walk'. I quickly correct myself and he beams at me and then answers my question speaking slowly enough for me to understand. There are chairs on the labyrinth because... it's Pentecost. Ahhh! In France, Pentecost is like Christmas or Easter here. People who never go to church any other time of the year flock to services on that day. The banks close. A lot of the stores close. In some cities the subways close. and shops are closed. The restaurants stay open because... it *is* France! Well naturally it's a big deal holiday. That makes sense to us – the Holy Spirit is arriving! We're all going to become intimately reconnected with God and each other. This is a big deal! Of course all the parts of everyday life would cease... wouldn't they...?

Actually I do think it's a big deal. It's when the Holy Spirit comes into us and we feel it and see it in each other. That's what happened to the disciples. It's what happened to the whole group of people in that room – they had no doubt that it was a big deal. First a great wind. Then the flames. Then the speaking in tongues. In other words, all barriers to true communication between them vanish. And not only that, there's visions and dreams too, and prophecies. Now we can see into the future and we can see where the absence of space for God in people's lives is causing turmoil, sorrow, violence and a deep deep un-nameable hunger in the world. We can see it. We can feel it. And with the coming of the Holy Spirit into each one of us we receive courage and honesty to do something about all these wounds of the world.

How does the Holy Spirit do that? What do we know about it? About *her*? We know she is also called Wisdom and she has been part of God from the beginning of time. We know she is the

spirit of Truth. We know she is the spirit of Love. We know we are not in charge. We know death is not the end of our lives. Death is simply a doorway back to being with God. We also know when Jesus gives peace he does not give peace as the world gives or perceive peace. So we can extrapolate from there that the Spirit of Truth will also not be the 'truth' that the world knows and values. The Spirit of Truth will encompass and embrace differences and diversity. It grows out of that ultimate truth that every single one of us is made in the image of God and is utterly precious to God, beloved and dear. Every single one of us.

The Spirit of Truth will live in us. How will we be changed by that – if we're willing? Because always we live with the knowledge that God does not force us to do anything. God invites but – for the most part – does not compel. God is endlessly patient, infinitely loving, abundantly kind. God does not compel us, but honesty does. If we allow the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit to dwell within us than we can expect to be compelled towards honesty. Compelled towards living into our best selves, even when it's inconvenient, uncomfortable, even painful. It seems that when we're willing to live into the big spaces, to live on our own growing edge, to stretch ourselves into becoming who God knows we really are... we can expect to encounter strangeness, uneasiness, fear, and all kinds of other uncomfortable sensations. And we can also count on encountering great joy and great peace. And of course, the source of all love, the Holy of Holies, the Divine Creator and Lover of the world. And then there's the huge realisation – at last we have come home, at last we are living in that place we were hungering for all along.

Because there is a hunger in us. In all of us. We know the stories – the full churches at Christmas and Easter in our country. In France at Pentecost. What is that if not a secret hunger for connection with the Source of all life and love? Remember the story of the toddler talking to the baby? The private conversation at last permitted by the loving parents – remember? It goes like this. Young parents are expecting their second child with great anticipation. And they're careful to prepare and reassure their firstborn that their love is plentiful. Nevertheless they receive countless warnings from well-meaning people never to leave their new-born alone with the toddler because jealousy can come up and it can cause firstborn children to do terrible things. BUT their toddler keeps asking for time alone with the baby. Finally they decide it will be ok – they'll leave the baby monitor turned on and listen to make sure nothing goes wrong. The toddler goes into the nursery and closes the door. The parents lean close to the monitor, hoping they've made the right decision and they hear the toddler saying this: "Tell me about God; I'm beginning to forget."

The hunger is for God. And if we forget who God is the hunger does not go away. It's still there, nameless, undefined, amorphous, pressing against our consciousness. We are hard-wired to yearn for relationship, for intimacy with the Divine. Nothing can take that out of us. Nothing can erase that essential aspect of who we are. The poet Jane Kenyon says in her poem "Don't be afraid. God does not leave us comfortless." Believe it. God sends the Holy Spirit. The wind. The flame. The breath. For us.

*(amen)*