

Romans 8:22-27

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoptions as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

“Holy Smoke!”

When you send forth your spirit, they are created;

And you renew the face of the ground.

Psalm 104:30

Currently, four hundred active volcanoes form the **Ring of Fire** (from IMAX movie) that regularly groan with nature's pains of re-creating the face of the earth. Explosive smoke, consuming fire, and hot molten lava violently re-shape the face of the land around each mountain. Just as important, earth, air, water and fire also shape the landscape of souls. The belief system of indigenous people is often colored by fear, respect, reverence, natural wisdom, and a humble acceptance of one's place in the cycle of life. Smoking mountains and tongues of fire also shape the culture and color the spirit of villagers who suffer under groans of mother earth. People

in volcanic societies often engage in community rituals to imagine the past and to re-member their dynamic relationship with the mighty mountain.

In one Indonesian village the men and boys meet around campfires to engage in a dance that ritualizes their life and death struggle with the volcano. In the dance the old men teach their sons what it means to be a man of bravery, courage, sacrifice, honor, and strength. But the real life drama for this Indonesian village began many years ago when they started earning a living by mining volcanic sulfur. Because the job was dangerous, physically demanding, and deadly, only the young men with strong hands and bodies qualified for the job of harvesting the sulfur from the dangerous slopes . . . only the brave men were chosen to breath in the deadly sulfur fumes. Today, although the life expectancy for miners is less than 30 years of age, the young men of the village are still proud to be selected for the work. They celebrate their sacrifice as a glorification of their physical attributes and see it as an honorable way to provide for their families and community. Like male stags in the wilderness competing for mates the young men of the village compete for the mining jobs, welcoming the opportunity to turn their ritual of campfire dance into the most dangerous life and death struggle of their life.

When I learned about this culture and saw images of young boys choking to death while mining the sulfur from the smoking mountain my gut reaction was anger: “What a horrible waste of precious human life!” “Why don't they think outside the box?” “Why don't they put their heads together and do some critical and creative thinking about ways to earn a living from the mountain that promotes life rather than death?” Don't they know that there is a Creative Force that is greater than the tearing down and building up forces of mother nature? Haven't they heard about the Creator God who not only gives birth to creation but also remains in creation as Creative Spirit to re-create and

promote life? Don't they know that what they are looking at is more than volcanic smoke? Don't they know that it is Holy Smoke?

In our church tradition, my fiery questioning of this kind is our Pentecostal equivalent of speaking in tongues. The theologian of Romans 8: explains: In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

Holy Smoke! What life changing, hope filled belief! I think that I first heard about the existence of God as Creator in Sunday School when we read the stories in the Bible about our forefathers and foremothers of faith who gathered around their campfires to ritual their relationship with creation. Their campfire dances were unique in that they were primarily a dance of words. Unlike sun, fire, storm or rain worshippers who bowed to the might of the elements, Biblical people told stories, prayed prayers, and sang songs about their faith in Yahweh, an unseen Creative Force that was greater than creation itself. When they gathered together under the stars and around their campfires they spoke of a Creator who not only gives birth to everything but also orders creation in such a way that it can re-new and re-create itself. Around their fires of life the singers sang:

When You send forth your Spirit they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground (psalm 104: 30).

Around the fires the prayers prayed for the Creator to bless them with abundant eternal life.

May the glory of the Lord endure forever,
may the Lord rejoice in his works—
who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.

Around the campfires at night, they sang, they prayed, and then they told stories about the many ways in which the Creator renews creation, transforms lives, and redeems human history through the Creative Spirit's powerful pro-life work. They told the story about Moses who spoke Yahweh's word of life---empowering God's people to think, believe, and act outside their box of bondage. The disciples told their stories about Jesus and how his sacrificial love for people renewed human hearts in love for God. The church told its story about how the Jesus community of faith was renewed when the Spirit came to comfort, give hope, and empower people to tell others about the mighty work of resurrection that God accomplished in Jesus.

Today is Pentecost Sunday . . . The birthday of the church. The candles that we light remind us of the Holy Spirit's passion for re-creating us into a community of faith who work for the common good, commonwealth, and well being of all. In this hope we pray in the name of Jesus:

Burning in a bush
Blazing in a fiery pillar
Moses met you
COME GOD AND MEET US NOW
Roasting fish in embers
Sitting round a bonfire
Disciples met you
COME GOD AND MEET US NOW
Fire around their heads
Holiness in their lives
Believers met you
COME GOD AND MEET US NOW

(Cherish The Earth by Mary Lou, p. 182)