

Richard Rohr's Meditation

From the Centre for Action and Contemplation



Community

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If we believe in a Trinitarian God, then we must hold fast to the truth that God is community—a completely loving, mutually self-giving, endlessly generative relationship between equal partners. We are included in that community and so is everyone else!

Once you see the basic truth . . . that we are all God's children and therefore absolutely equal, the rest of it is just common sense. —Beatrice Bruteau

The total social program that Jesus advocated was based on communion, friendship, distribution, and partnership. This contrasts with a social organization based on domination, exploitation, accumulation, and force. —Beatrice Bruteau

As individuals and communities, we can respond with justice and compassion, or we can double down on the pursuit of accumulation and power, with no more than a return to business as usual.

Practice: **Ubuntu: I Am Because We Are**

*One place we might begin to prioritise community is with the spiritual traditions that supported and informed the work of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In her essay from the book *Revives My Soul Again*, author Diana L. Hayes explores the basis of King's vision for the "Beloved Community":*

African American spirituality was forged in the fiery furnace of slavery in the United States. The ore was African in origin, in worldview, in culture and traditions. . . . There is no life without the community and there is no community without the active participation of all. As a well-known African proverb states: "I am because we are." That is, unlike in Western society, it is not the individual but the community that is of critical importance. *[Richard here: We're seeing this value in action right now with individuals changing their habits, lives, and livelihoods at great personal cost for the sake of the global community.]*

African spirituality is grounded in the very lives and activities of the African people. They live it, breathe it, walk it, sing it, and dance it. There is no life without religion, the interconnection of all people, all created things, and God: . . . "Relationships among all elements of creation . . . are the essence of African spirituality, because Africans believe that only through harmonious relationships is cosmic existence possible and its vital force preserved." . . . [1]

An extension of this understanding can be found in that of *Ubuntu* (other names are used by different African peoples). . . . "A person with *Ubuntu* (full humanity) is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good." . . . [2] What *Ubuntu* underscores is "the vital importance of mutual recognition and respect complemented by mutual care and sharing in the construction of human relations." [3] *Ubuntu* is manifested in self-giving and readiness to cooperate and communicate with others." [4]

This understanding . . . of full humanity lies at the heart of [Dr. Martin Luther] King's efforts to develop the Beloved Community, which he saw as that "period of social harmony and universal brotherhood that would follow the current social struggle." [5] At that time, blacks and whites would be reconciled and able to walk together as a family of brothers and sisters without racial strife or disharmony.

The wisdom of Ubuntu, this reminder that "I am because you are," seems particularly important for our times, especially in the Western world. Even before social distancing began, loneliness—and the anxiety and depression that often accompany it—had reached epidemic proportions and I imagine those numbers will only increase with so many people being further isolated by recent circumstances. I hope and pray that God, who is relationship itself, will not let us forget that we belong to each other.