

**Love, God and Community**  
**(Luke 1:5-45)**  
**By Simone Oliver**

Where do we find community?

We most often understand community as a group who shares one or more common demographics; cultural heritage, shared religious beliefs, common interest, gender, etc., something that makes it distinct in some way from the larger society and it is so. However, for the purposes of this discussion I want to share from the notion of common union. I use common union to differentiate our typical understanding of community because anyone can be in community based a demographic but common union is based on Holy love, the love produced in us by the Holy Spirit.

We find Jesus in John 17:21-22, saying these words. "I pray for them all to be joined together as one even as you and I, Father, are joined together as one. I pray for them to become one with us so that the world will recognize that you sent me. For the very glory you have given to me I have given them so that they will be joined together as one and experience the same unity that we enjoy." I posit that this glory that brought them into union is the love that was birthed in them through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts gives us insight to this experience of common union. In the developing new testament church, believers had in common one mind and one heart. They are joined together by an internal spiritual work of Holy Love, not by a denominational creed or religious dogma, not by external demographics.

It is this Holy Love that transcended age and social location by brining Mary and Elizabeth together. It was this Holy Love that dissolved the disgrace, and rejection that Elizabeth and Zacharias carried in their hearts because they could not produce an heir. It was also Holy Love that eclipsed the fear that enveloped Mary's inexperience and uncertainty. This Holy Love, this inner work

of the Holy Spirit caused three (3) of the most unlikely characters to come together in common union. A priest, an older barren woman and a young girl filled with uncertainty and promise. Related by blood and marriage, but nothing more in common. But God coursed the lives of this dubious team and brings together the old and young, the experienced and inexperienced, the disgraced and the favored and uses them together to execute the most loving act known to humanity. I suggest that this love, this Holy Love, will compel us to connect with the young and old, good and bad, the bruised and unlovely. It is this Holy Love that gives beauty for ashes. That heals the pain and rejection of the broken and restores hope to the hopeless. This is the love that declares, "In Christ Jesus, all are worthy."

Much of my reflection on the text centered around Mary being an agent of change. After all, she was charged with bringing forth the full manifestation of God's love to the earth, Jesus the Christ, the God-man. I was enlightened particularly by how her faith transformed her fear into possibility. She was initially deeply troubled and afraid. But after the angel gave testimony of God's power to take what we would consider old, rejected and useless (a barren Elizabeth) and not only make her pregnant but fill her with the joyful anticipation of being a participant in the greatest love story on earth, Mary moved from fear to faith. That is what love will do. Perfect love, Holy Love will cast out fear.

Love beckoned Mary to leave the safety and familiarity of her home and take the arduous journey to connect with Elizabeth. After days of walking, she finally reached the new place she would call home for a season. Elizabeth beholds Mary, and her baby leaps. It is my ever evolving and fluid theology that allows me to perceive her as a reformer. I suggest that there are times when we, like Mary, are called to move from fear to faith to take an arduous journey into uncharted territories. There are times we are called to walk away from the safe and familiar structures and institutions that have become family but are

stagnant, stale and represent the status quo. To walk away from the spaces that constrict and constrain the movement of God. Places where love is no longer being served at the table, to give birth to a community that reflects the common union of Holy Love. For surely if Jesus' life caused a cultural revolution. Empowered by love, so can we.

Church history reveals a consistent renewal, reformation and revival of "the church" through the ages. We must learn to sit in the tension and ambiguity of it all. The contradictions, the opposition, the dissonance, the highs and the lows. All that is good about it and all that is bad and realize that WE are the church. Like Mary, we must not yield to fear, but by faith we must create the community we are longing for. Where do we find community? We find community any place where all people find acceptance and live joyfully in their differences and that begins with me. We find community where service and self-discovery become the essence of ministry. We find community when we construct a theology of God that is rooted in understanding and trust. We find community when our suffering is redemptive.

Be inspired by love. Be committed to love. Love covers a multitude of sin. May we yield ourselves as vessels of Holy Love and as purveyors of Truth. Amen.