

View from Grabbist June 25

Yesterday I picked some nice fresh stems off the top of some of the prolific nettles in my garden, washed them, blanched them and cooked up some nettle soup. It was yummy. What struck me about this whole exercise was how much tastier the soup was simply because it was a gift! Not only so, but I took the gift and did something creative with it, so the gift combined with my efforts made the soup so much more special.

Currently, I am reading a beautiful book called 'Braiding Sweetgrass', by Robin Wall Kimmerer (first nation North American and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation). In one chapter she draws out the contrast between how the nature of something changes depending on whether we have received it as a gift or as a commodity. We live in a society where just about everything is commodified and therefore can be traded as part of a market economy. The tendency then is towards utility: we buy, we use, we discard and the consequences for the losers of this system (the poor) and for the planet are catastrophic. Kimmerer points us to a better way to live together. The very acts of giving and receiving forge connection between us and mother nature and also between one and another. There is nothing romantic in this, and she astutely observes that '*... in the gift economy, gifts are not free. The essence of the gift is that it creates a set of relationships. The currency of a gift economy is, at its root reciprocity. In Western thinking, Private land is understood to be a "bundle of rights," whereas in a gift economy property has a "bundle of responsibilities" attached..*'

In the glimpse of the radical life of the early Christians, we can discern something of this. The earlier followers of Jesus, having freely received the *gift* of the Holy Spirit, responded immediately by selling their property and sharing everything. In this context, they ate together with glad and generous hearts (Acts 2.42-47). This later evolved into what we now know as the Eucharist, and all too often it became detached from the *gift* economy from which it emerged, degenerating into ritual to make people feel better while continuing to trade and barter in an unjust market world.

The true Pentecostal spirit is much more akin to indigenous First Nation traditions and what we patronisingly call 'primitive societies' than it is to the domineering form of early-modern era 'Christian' civilisation which conquered them. We are seeing the grim product of this program writ large across the world today, with everything being able to be reduced to a 'deal'.

However, there is deep hope. People are weary of this soulless way of life and its sometimes terrifying consequences. Kimmerer ends her chapter by saying, '*a great longing is upon us, to live again in a world made of gifts. I can scent it coming, like the fragrance of ripening strawberries rising on the breeze.*'

Or, perhaps, in the taste of nettle soup....
Can you smell it too....?

