

"Accept the contributions from all whose hearts are moved to offer them," God tells Moses after the people have escaped from Pharaoh's army and fled into the desert, after the Israelites' thirst and hunger has been alleviated by God, and after Moses and his father-in-law devise a decision-making system that distributes power among the community.

It strikes me that God meets first their physical needs, then their need for control over their circumstances, and that God follows these provisions with a blue-print for the Tabernacle.

Willing donors create a collection of valuables: gold, silver, bronze, acacia wood, olive oil, gemstones which are to be crafted by artisans to create a community space that honors God and allows people to commune with one another and with God.

I am awestruck at the thought that so many details were provided to a people who must have been so incredibly tired. God's kindness and wisdom continue to delight me. He didn't ask an exhausted people to do the hard, relational work of co-design. He gives them the plan and puts them to work, continually emphasizing that the Tabernacle should reflect fine craftsmanship: Acacia wood which is one of the most durable hard woods and includes a varied grain highlighted by a range of colors, a tent covering made of "one continuous piece.", gold accessories decorated with pure gold in the shape of "almond buds and branches". He continually asks them to take valuable, durable, beautiful materials that are locally-sourced to build something together, something they would value, something that would build their capacity to work together, and something that was designed to bring them closer to a leader whose heart is never hard.

As an educator, it does not escape me that God may have been teaching his people to build collaboratively. In several places, God's design emphasizes a focus on integrity, both structural integrity (durable wood, durable fibers etc.) as well as systems' integrity (a just distribution of power and decision-making). Every time an Israelite hammered a piece of the lampstand or wove the fibers of the tent covering, he/she was reminded (by God's design and likely his/her neighbor) to make 'one continuous piece'. What a fabulously effective way to give people who had been traumatized a tangible experience of building something together according to God's design. As they hammered gold and sewed the tent cloth and watered the next generation of acacia and olive trees, their brains created symbolic representations for the foundation of community life. He met their need for gross-motor movement and instant gratification (common to those who experience trauma) and, in so doing, he not only encouraged them to build a finite space where they would each see their individual contributions and feel they belonged, he also laid the groundwork for them to build the community they would need to build once they crossed the Jordan River.

As this pandemic shifts into a new season, I wonder if this blue-print is worth noting. Now that we are increasingly able to leave our homes and the small social circles that have defined the parameters of our lives, I am hopeful that we are fully equipped to build collaboratively. We can call donors and artisans together to, again, build something durable and beautiful that will fortify our relationships with one another and with God so that the architecture of our brains will continue to support community life both now and in the future.