



Getting Rid of the Bubble Wrap – Touchpoint for March 30, 2022

Isaiah 43:16-21 (The Voice) *This is what the Eternal One says, the One who does the impossible, the One who makes a path through the sea, a smooth road through tumultuous waters, the One who drags out chariots and horses, armies and warriors, and drowns them in the sea—They will go down, never to rise again; their lives are snuffed out like a candle wick:*

Eternal One: *Don't revel only in the past, or spend all your time recounting the victories of days gone by. Watch closely: I am preparing something new; it's happening now, even as I speak, and you're about to see it. I am preparing a way through the desert; waters will flow where there had been none. Wild animals in the fields will honor Me; the wild dogs and surly birds will join in. There will be water enough for My chosen people, trickling springs and clear streams running through the desert. My people, the ones whom I chose and created for My own, will sing My praise.*

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

"I am about to do a new thing, now it springs forth... I will make rivers in the desert." NRSV

It is a passage of contrasts. Old versus new. Looking back as opposed to looking forward. God as bubble wrap or as a transformer of things.

Isaiah conjures up the scene from the Exodus. The mighty act of God as God holds back the water to allow the Israelites to walk through the Red Sea, and then unleashes it to cause the death and destruction of the Egyptians.

That scene sends one back to the beginning of creation... Where the chaos of the deep, the chaos of the waters is pushed back, and dry land and all the inhabitants of the earth are allowed to live. God holding back, putting a wall up between us and the chaos of the world.

It is, I dare say, how we normally think of God. As a protective bubble or wall that holds back the chaos of the world. God primarily as protector of us. God as bubble wrap or wall.

"Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take."

God the protector. Holding the chaos of the world at bay. Walling it off.

And in addition, if God can be the destroyer of my enemies with that chaos, even better. It's kind of a two-for-one deal.

But Isaiah tells us to forget that. The Mystery is not going to work in that way anymore. It isn't about walling off the chaos and desolation of the world – but transforming it.

And that is good news. Because we all have chaos in our lives. No one gets out of this life without scars or walking with a limp. Chaos and desolation will come to us whether we like it or not.

And if our primary image of the Mystery is simply as protector, then when chaos befalls us our first reaction is to wonder, "Why me? What did I do wrong? Why doesn't God love me enough to protect me?"

“Why, if you just pray hard enough, God will rescue you.” Because let’s face it ... I’d much rather be rescued than transformed, changed.

The idea of God as a giant bubble wrap or wall around our lives is not only unrealistic, but unhealthy... even as it remains a strong pull.

And so Isaiah speaks a new word, a new vision, a new working of the Mystery in the world.

“Thus says the Lord... I am about to do a new thing ... I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert...” NRSV

This isn’t about protection – but transformation. This isn’t about a God who stands outside and above it all, building walls and a bubble for us – but one intimately connected to the human condition and its workings.

Making a way in the ocean is a holding back of the chaos; making a way in the desert, causing rivers in the desert, is creating life out of parchedness and desolation. Whereas God saved the people in the Exodus by turning the sea into dry land, God now saves them in the desert by turning dry land into running rivers.

It’s a whole new direction. It’s a new way of thinking. The Mystery is doing something new. God isn’t just holding back the chaos of the world; the Mystery is creating something new out of it.

Somewhere between chaos and desolation, God creates something new.

And so this text is a text to read when it feels like the world is crashing down around us, when our minds are too jaded and our spirits too discouraged to see how God may be present in our current darkness. This is the passage to read when we come face to face with the mess we as humans have made of our relationships and of this world, when we recognize how profoundly broken and how incapable of fixing ourselves we are. For it is in this place of helplessness and disorientation that hope emerges.

Is this what those who suffer from addiction mean when they say they have found life in the middle of their addiction, not from their addiction? Is this what those who have suffered serious illness or trauma mean when they say they have not been healed *from* their disease or trauma but *through* them?

If God is only capable of protection, of creating a bubble for us... then what hope is there when chaos befalls us?

And if the only God we have is one that can only hold back the chaos, then there is nothing left but despair when chaos hits. And we will be left feeling isolated and alone, with the feeling of a God who has failed us.

But if the divine Mystery is one who creates out of chaos, who brings life out of desolation, who can bring springs and living water to the deserts of life... then those times of chaos and desolation become birthing pangs and places of new creation.

But I am not sure I want a God who will work in new ways. I kind of like a predictable God. At 66, I’m kind of set in my ways and so I would prefer a God who is set as well. The world is changing too much. It is too chaotic for me, and I often feel isolated and alone.

So I prefer a God who doesn’t change. Because I kind of like living in the old glory days and *“reveling in the past, and recounting the victories of days gone by,”* to use the words of Isaiah. And I want a God who will simply build a wall between me and the chaos of the world and let me escape into a cocoon of ‘me and Jesus.’

And so this passage is a threat to me, because a God who is doing new things is a threat to my settled beliefs and religious systems.

But as Philip K. Dick wrote:

“Do not believe... do not assume that order and stability are always good, in a society or a universe. The old, the ossified, must always give way to new life and the birth of new things. Before the new things can be born the old must perish. This is a dangerous realization, because it tells us that we must eventually part with much of what is familiar to us. And that hurts. But that is part of the script of life. Unless we can psychologically accommodate change, we ourselves begin to die, inwardly. What I am saying is that objects, customs, habits, and ways of life must perish so that the authentic human being can live. And it is the authentic human being who matters most, the viable, elastic organism who can bounce back, absorb, and deal with the new.”

Look, I'm not a gardener and I've never played one on TV. But I have friends and family who are... gardeners, not TV actors. And they tell me that the only ground that can grow seeds, that can bring about new life, and new creation... is ground that has been plowed, ground that has been tilled, ground that has been **BROKEN**.

Maybe that is why in my life, those who I know who have a **peace** which passes my understanding are those I know who have gone through a **pain** which passes my understanding.

And yes, I admire the peace that they have, but I'm not really sure I want to go through what they have gone through to get there. Because you see, I'd much rather be rescued than transformed.

But my hope is not in being rescued – but in being transformed.

If all that our faith and religious life is about is building walls between us and the chaos of the world, it is a pathetic faith indeed.

The problem in our world and faith life is not that we don't have enough walls, or that our walls are not big enough. It's that we don't believe the Mystery is capable of transforming the chaos and desolation of the world.

And so it is left to the Mystery to simply break down the walls of our lives... to transform chaos to peace, to transform hatred to forgiveness, to transform death to life.

This is what Paul is speaking when he talks of the Christ breaking down the dividing walls of hostility. This is what Paul is speaking when he writes of universal restoration. The Mystery isn't about walling off and separating life – but transforming it and uniting it. As we have talked about before, the essence of the divine Mystery is not the separation of good and bad – but the transformation and uniting of all things. The healing of all things.

Think of Jesus on the cross in the middle of two thieves. Chaos on his left and desolation on his right. And the Father doesn't create a bubble wrap around Jesus but plants him right in the middle of it.

And there, in the midst of it all, something new is created. Something is being transformed. New life is emerging.

This is the story of crucifixion and resurrection.

Look at this meal...

Jesus takes bread and wine and uses them as symbols of the imminent dis-memberment and brokenness of his life – and transforms them into objects of healing and reconciliation, a place of re-membering and connection, a place of certainty of presence and forgiveness.

When I talk about this meal, I often say it is “where broken meets broken.” I could just as well say, I guess, “where healing meets healing.” Because it is in the brokenness of our lives, the plowed and tilled soil of our lives, where the seeds of new life get planted... and healing begins.

“See I am doing a new thing... with the chaos and desolation of your lives.”

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

See Him

(Keith Duke)

See him: 1) silent and lifeless 2) alone and forlorn 3) broken and helpless, crowned with a garland of thorns 4) as son and as brother 5) related to all 6) through the grief of a mother, hurting the most of all 7) as healer and teacher 8) as helper and friend 9) as prophet and preacher...

Ignore Him??? I doubt if you can.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(“Our Father,” Taize Reflections)

Benediction

Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace **(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)**

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the gentle night to you. Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.

Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.

Deep peace of Christ to you.