

Isaiah 42:1-9

The Servant, a Light to the Nations

42 Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.

² He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;

³ a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.

⁴ He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

⁵ Thus says God, the LORD,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:

⁶ I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,^[a]
a light to the nations,

⁷ to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

⁸ I am the LORD, that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.

⁹ See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.

Acts 10:34-43

Gentiles Hear the Good News – Right after Peter and Cornelius see visions

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.

³⁷ That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

³⁹ We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Matthew 3:16-17

¹⁶ And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved,^[a] with whom I am well pleased.”

A New Reformation Tuesday, January 3, 2017

As I see it, religion is at its best when it leads us forward, when it guides us in our spiritual growth as individuals and in our cultural evolution as a species. —Brian McLaren [1]

Yes, we live in very troubling times; *and* we are fortunate to be alive now when we have so much possibility for growth in love. Many say we are in the midst of a spiritual awakening. Theologian Harvey Cox calls it the Age of the Spirit. He writes: “Faith is resurgent, while dogma is dying. The spiritual, communal, and justice-seeking dimensions of Christianity are now its leading edge. . . . A religion based on subscribing to mandatory beliefs is no longer viable.”

January 8, 2017

Isaiah 42:1-9; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:16-17

Seeing the Spirit of God

Kerra Becker English

Richard Rohr, a prolific author and Franciscan priest likes to talk in sentences with a “yes, and” rather than a “no, but” in much of his writings, and this week one of his daily reflections started out just in that way. He said, “YES, we live in troubling times, AND we are fortunate to be alive now when we have so much possibility for growth in love.” Rohr and others who think like him postulate that we are living through a spiritual awakening, an “aha” time of transition and growth that often begins with a series of set-backs and pain.

I particularly like how he holds these two things in tension with one another – troubled times, and the capacity for human love to rise above such circumstances. It can be too easy for me to become an alarmist. I read the news and I worry about everything that “could” happen from the dismantlement of health care coverage, to a national registry of Muslims and a resurgence of other racial or religious prejudices, to the increasing effects of global warming, to the possibility of the engagement of nuclear weapons. It’s easy to get ramped up by current political tensions and especially by the media outlets that are quick to foster our greatest fears – no matter whether you prefer FoxNews, CNN, or whatever Internet sources that social media has determined are what you want to read. YES, it is important to notice and proclaim that we live in troubled times. No joke. There are real problems in our world today, and maybe the best news of all is that we can no longer sweep those problems under the rug without anyone noticing. Our heap of trouble has grown too real to hide and quite a daunting task to undo.

But getting bogged down in the trouble won’t be of ultimate use to anyone. It hurts. I know. There have been many days where simply encountering the stress of the day feels too hard, too deep, too overwhelming. It’s taken me awhile to get to Rohr’s second point and actually thank God for being alive during these troubled times. First, lament. Then, anger. All accompanied by a strong desire to ignore absolutely everything that doesn’t directly affect me. Then I realized that the trouble I was seeing I had a part in creating which means that I can also play a part in its healing. The human potential we have for growth in love is a message that will return and return to us if we keep reading scripture as not just an old book with a bunch of rules in it, but as God’s ongoing message of love for the world.

You see, God has been present in times of trouble before. We tend to know that presence by its elusive name – the Holy Spirit, who is the very breath of God. The Spirit, the least known, or the least acknowledged person of the Trinity shows up over the chaos from the very beginning. We don’t always know how to name or claim this presence though. We need the voices of prophets, and the visions of the apostles, and the keen observations of Jesus to remind us what it looks like when the Spirit is doing her work. I frequently say “her” because the Hebrew word *Ruah* that is the breath over the waters of creation is feminine. But the presence of God is neither confined by gender or limited by the dual nature we typically ascribe to human gender. The tenderness shown as a dove descends from heaven and whispers in Jesus’ ear holds

the ideal of both motherly and fatherly love in saying: “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.” The Spirit is wisdom. The Spirit is fire, and energy, and justice, and love.

And the Spirit shows up when the going gets difficult. Take, for example the prophet Isaiah’s description of the servant who will be infused with the Spirit. The Spirit will not let go until justice is served in all the nations. I’m afraid this takes servants to continue to have courage and not give up even if we feel bent to breaking, even if the light of our one last candle seems to be going out. You might think a comment like that comes from my alarmist nature – but it really comes from prophets bearing witness to the prophetic. The prophet sees every injury, every injustice, every oppression, every blindness, every imprisonment so that the work is never truly done – until some elusive promised hope of the future comes. This promise for righteousness comes daily, and is foiled by us daily, and yet returns again without fail. Yes, we are living in a time of trouble, AND we thank God that we are alive in the midst of today’s trouble. We deal with today, today. And God has made something new somewhere today, and the Spirit will do it again tomorrow.

It’s about seeing the trouble and the possibility, the revelation in the turmoil, the hope in the future.