

Could Such a Dream be True?  
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Most gracious God, bless the thoughts of our hearts and the words on my lips. Help us to grow in faith and in love - that our every thought and action may be pleasing to you and a blessing to ourselves and to others - we ask it in the name of Jesus. Amen

Walter Bruggeman states that:

"The book of Isaiah is like a great fugue, always advancing to fresh statements, at the same time continually returning to pick up and restate themes already sounded."

It seems that those in the time of Isaiah were as subject to "forgetfulness" as the fugues that play in many of our lives today. As a friend of mine reminds me often, "You have a built-in forgetter, Ray. **Remember** that!"

Over and over the readings of the books of the Old or First Testament and the Second or New Testament are about reminding us of God. Whether through prophets or gospel writers – this life is about God and God in the lives of human history – and before – and after...

In a way, we are all in the middle. A place of unknown and uncertainties – and, quite paradoxically, a place pregnant with an innate guidance mechanism that gives birth when this spirit of ours is freed into the next dimension, realm, or heaven, if you like. We are destined to be "on our way..." always.

"The way" is pointed to over and again by the prophets and Jesus, along with a series of directions, offered in a variety of statements, but always with the same basics:

- Remember from where it was you came – long before your birth. That will guide your actions in being faithful, with the help of others who have gone before you.
- Seek the presence of God in your life and continue a life-long process of moving toward oneness with that Power. It is in this way we come to know ourselves and God - through service to God by helping others, passing it on, if you will.
- Then, at the end of this journey, we will transit to where it was we were known long before we were born. We really don't know this place, except that it will be an embodiment (without the body ☺) of completeness and peace in a way exceeding the best we can imagine; for that is the promise: "You will know peace, a peace beyond all understanding."

Servanthood. It's the core. It's the core of Isaiah and Jesus' teachings and all who have followed. The spiritual life is one of the *practice of servanthood*.

It seems right to believe that we were born to be servants of God, to bring the light of God to others who brood or are captive to the darkness. This is not a limited effort, nor is it about outcomes. (From today's reading of Isaiah)

“And now God says, ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’”

In this Second of the Four Servant Songs or Poems of Isaiah, this dream, vision, the prospect of salvation will hinge on servanthood and witness! Not war – but witness, words... and not just locally – but to the end of the earth – a couple of ways you could read into that.

“God named me and made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of God's hand God hid me; God made me a polished arrow, and hid me away in God's quiver.”

Weapons replaced with witness and the word.

We have all been prepared to be such servants, and we do *continue to practice* these things in striving always to be faithful. In a few minutes, when we receive the reports at our annual meeting – keep this in mind. Look at the reports not just as a reports, but as a retelling of the faith we have in this commitment to servanthood and the Spirit.

See these reports as indications of the ways we are actively engaged in this work of faithfulness, even if we sometimes forget to see it as such, or if we think such efforts pale against the greater demands of a broken work – and we diminish ourselves and our efforts.

I like to always remember that our work is not about the outcomes. That's the Holy Spirit's job. All we need to do is to stay on the path and God takes care of the rest. It's the path that gives it all meaning.

In the times of Isaiah and Jesus, times of a smaller world, with civilizations limited by size and geography, the intensity of life had to be more like Baghdad at the current moment than Palisades. Would it be better, easier for us to know the need for God in this world if we lived in the midst of the kind of strife the ancient author of Isaiah describes? Would the idea of faithfulness, just staying on the path have been easier to grasp in just how hard that is – and seen as the true accomplishment that it is?

Who cannot feel a little lost and powerless these days after nothing more than scanning the front page of the New York Times, this morning being no exception? Who has not felt the pain of being unable to alter, change, or influence conditions – whether in our own personal lives or the broader communities in which we live?

So what so we do?

Jesus tells us, just as he told Andrew and Simon in this morning's readings: "Come and see." Follow and you will know. Just don't go at it alone...

In John's passage this morning we have another account of Jesus' baptism. You'll notice that, unlike the gospels, John the Baptist does not baptize Jesus. And, it is John the Baptist, not Jesus, who hears the words, "Here's the Lamb of God."

John the Evangelist makes it clear in his high Christology that no man would ever baptize Jesus – for there would be no sin for which Jesus needed to be cleansed.

Further, John's writings make it was apparent that John the Baptist recognized Jesus as the Messiah, dispelling any question about whether it was John the Baptist or Jesus, who was "the One." In fact, in John's Gospel, John the Baptist tells his followers that while he himself baptized with water, Jesus would be the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Go to him. And when they do, Jesus says, "Come, and see."

Regardless of the differences between the Synoptics and John, we know that these followers of Jesus, all of them combined, were unable to stop the suffering, wars, brokenness of the world – even while Jesus was with them company. Why? Because that was never his ultimate goal. Jesus's purpose, his goal was much more basic and eternally more powerful.

The measure of faithfulness and servanthood was not a drastic change in conditions, but a truthful, steady, and, yes, revolutionary – if sometimes, imperfect – witness to *remembering* God in our lives – and acting and being – from the God within. Acting and being from the God within – with one another. And from there – from that center – be in relation to the world.

Remember God.

All these writings are reminders, simply of that. Come, see, be with God and carry the light wherever you go. The Holy Spirit will take care of the rest.

We know this, and from time to time contemporary leaders remind us of this. You may have read what is said about The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the cover of today's bulletin, referring to a time when he talked about the end of his mortal life in early 1968 and how he would like to be remembered:

"I'd like somebody to mention on that day that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to give his life serving others...to love and serve humanity."

Servanthood. Be remembered for servanthood.

May it be so for all of us.

Amen.

## The Servant Songs of Isaiah: (Notes from various sources)

**Isaiah 42:1-4:** Introduces the Servant as “the chosen one, endowed with (Yahweh’s) spirit to bring forth ‘justice’ (KJV “judgment”) to the nations.” She/He will work quietly and “unobtrusively,” without failure or discouragement until justice is accomplished.

**Isaiah 49:1-6:** The Servant announces that he/she has been called by Yahweh from birth and ready for the mission “to the distant people.” Here the servant is identified as “Israel,” in whom God will be glorified. The servant is to restore Israel and to be a light to the nations (gentiles), “that Yahweh’s salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

**Isaiah 50:4-9:** Though the word servant does not appear in the text, the servanthood is implied. The servant describes how “Yahweh wakens the servant morning by morning to hear as disciples hear.”

**Isaiah 52:13-53:12:** Describes the suffering servant. The passage describes the servant as disfigured and despised, and supposed “stricken by God.” There comes a recognition that this wounding is for the sins of others, not the servant’s own. The servant is laid in a “felon’s grave.”