

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

The Role of Redemption

Old Testament Lesson

Isaiah 44:21-28 (NRSV)

- ²¹ Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant;
I formed you, you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me.
- ²² I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist;
return to me, for I have redeemed you.
- ²³ Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it; shout, O depths of the earth;
break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it!
For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel.
- ²⁴ Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb:
I am the LORD, who made all things,
who alone stretched out the heavens,
who by myself spread out the earth;
- ²⁵ who frustrates the omens of liars, and makes fools of diviners;
who turns back the wise, and makes their knowledge foolish;
- ²⁶ who confirms the word of his servant, and fulfills the prediction of his messengers;
who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be inhabited,"
and of the cities of Judah, "They shall be rebuilt, and I will raise up their ruins";
- ²⁷ who says to the deep, "Be dry - I will dry up your rivers";
- ²⁸ who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd, and he shall carry out all my purpose";
and who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be rebuilt,"
and of the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."

Bible/Sermon Focus

This week's Scripture is from the middle section of Isaiah, known by many as "Second Isaiah." Some scholars point out that the prophet's work can be broken into three large sections, defined by the three distinct time periods in the history of the people of Israel.

Very broadly speaking, "First Isaiah" was written before the Babylonian Exile, "Second Isaiah" was written when the people were in exile, and "Third Isaiah" was written upon their return to their homeland.

(It should be noted that recent scholarship has begun to offer some differing analyses of the structure of the book.)

In this week's passage, the prophet asks the people to remember the transgressions of the past and makes a bold claim that God will redeem them, rebuild them, and raise them up again. This call to remembrance is issued to a people who are experiencing the consequences of the disobedience of their ancestors. To the exiled community, God calls, "Return to me, for I have redeemed you."

The work of the Holy Spirit is “redemption,” repairing or making things right. When suffering is alleviated, when violence is resisted, when wounds are healed, we are experiencing redemption. And true redemption cannot happen unless the wounds that have been inflicted actually heal. Redemption is the repairing of the acts of violence that have been done, to one another and to all of creation.

Like Isaiah’s exiled community, redemption can happen across generations. American abolitionist Rev. Theodore Parker said, “I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.”

A century later, that idea was paraphrased by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during the civil rights movement when he said, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” And a generation after Dr. King that arc is still bending, as the world still seeks justice.

The Spirit’s work, then, now, and always, is moving creation toward healing and wholeness, continually calling to the world, “Return to me, for I have redeemed you.”

Discussion Questions

1. When have you experienced a “redemption” moment? As an individual? Or as a community?
2. “God doesn’t remove our suffering, God redeems it.” Do you agree with this statement from the sermon? Why or why not? What does this idea mean for you?
3. Have you experienced a healing moment of redemption in the sharing of your story with another person or in a small group? Describe that moment.
4. Can you think of an example of “trans-generational redemption” as defined in this week’s sermon?

Prayer

Spirit of God, redeem us. Remember us. Restore us. Rebuild your remnant people as a shining city on a hill that cannot be hidden. We hear your call, Lord, and we see your movement in the world. Come, Holy Spirit. Redeem us again. Amen.

When we talk about the Spirit as redeemer we are not talking about something small. We are talking about the overall restoration of all of creation.