

**Spiritus Mundi**  
**Rev. Steven M. Conger**  
**January 9, 2022**

Isaiah 43:1-7 (CEB)

*But now, says the Lord—  
the one who created you, Jacob,  
the one who formed you, Israel:  
Don't fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name; you are mine.  
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
when through the rivers, they won't sweep over you.  
When you walk through the fire, you won't be scorched  
and flame won't burn you.  
I am the Lord your God,  
the holy one of Israel, your savior.  
I have given Egypt as your ransom,  
Cush and Seba in your place.  
Because you are precious in my eyes,  
you are honored, and I love you.  
I give people in your place,  
and nations in exchange for your life.  
Don't fear,  
I am with you.  
From the east I'll bring your children;  
from the west I'll gather you.  
I'll say to the north, "Give them back!"  
and to the south, "Don't detain them."  
Bring my sons from far away,  
and my daughters from the end of the earth,  
everyone who is called by my name  
and whom I created for my glory,  
whom I have formed and made.*

Our Scripture this morning is rather intriguing.

Most of us are not too sure what to do with the prophets.

Some of us avoid them because we hear them as bellicose proclaimers of collective sin  
Which --- they often were

And let's be honest --- as one reads the Hebrew Bible --- what we often call the Old Testament --  
- it is clear that Israel was guilty of a multitude of sins and in need of being called to account for  
them.

One of the reason we like to avoid the prophets is because we too are guilty of collective sin and  
don't particularly want to be told about it.

It is much more fun to listen to the prophets call out ancient people  
--- it is much less comforting to have those same prophets call us out.

But this passage this morning is different.

It comes from what is often called Deutero or Second Isaiah which was written during the time  
of the exile.

The first part of Isaiah (chapters 1-39) was written before the exile and are filled with warnings  
to the Jewish people

The exile is when the Jewish people were forced to leave Jerusalem and were carted off  
to Babylon

It is important for us to know --- that 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah is written during this period of exile.

For as Isaiah 40 tells us

Comfort, comfort my people!  
says your God.

Speak compassionately to Jerusalem,  
and proclaim to her that her compulsory service has ended,  
that her penalty has been paid,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins!

Our scripture passage this morning shows the capacity of the prophet Isaiah to offer reassurance  
and compassion --- not just warning and threat.

This poem speaks --- tender, encouraging, empowering words to those who faced an uncertain  
future.

In their original context, the words in this passage helped motivate the Judean exiles to embrace their faith and return to Jerusalem to rebuild.

The prophet evoked images of divine love and care to speak to the exiles who tentatively considered whether to leave the stability of life in Babylon to return to the rubble of their former homeland.

As the exiled Jewish people embark on the journey back home, the prophet speaks of divine presence and protection.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
when through the rivers, they won't sweep over you.  
When you walk through the fire, you won't be scorched  
and flame won't burn you.  
I am the Lord your God,  
the holy one of Israel, your savior.

For the people first hearing this prophecy --- they would hear things that we very well might miss.

Isaiah echo's images of the Exodus (when God lead the people out of Egypt.)

In order to gain entrance into the promised land, the people passed through the waters of both the Sea of Reeds and the Jordan river.

Isaiah reminds them that God will guide them once again through those waters.

But it is the last part of this passage that really speaks to me.

I love how Eugene Peterson translates and interprets this passage in The Message:

“So don't be afraid: I'm with you.  
I'll round up all your scattered children,  
pull them in from east and west.  
I'll send orders north and south:  
'Send them back.  
Return my sons from distant lands,  
my daughters from faraway places.  
I want them back, every last one who bears my name,  
every man, woman, and child  
Whom I created for my glory,  
yes, personally formed and made each one.’”

And for me, since I was already pulled back to Genesis earlier in this passage, I am forced to ask:  
Who did God create.

And the answer is, of course, found throughout scripture:  
ALL OF US

There are so many verses that come to mind:

Colossians 1:16 (CEB)

Because all things were created by him:

both in the heavens and on the earth,  
the things that are visible and the things that are invisible.  
Whether they are thrones or powers,  
or rulers or authorities,  
all things were created through him and for him.

Or the passage Mary preached from last week:

John 1:1-3 (CEB)

In the beginning was the Word  
and the Word was with God  
and the Word was God.

The Word was with God in the beginning.  
Everything came into being through the Word,  
and without the Word  
nothing came into being.

God is the creator of EVERYTHING  
I think I can safely say that

I love poetry, but I also need to admit, I don't always understand the poet.

As I was cleaning out my office at home, I came across a notebook of poetry I attempted to write  
when I was in college --- it wasn't very good.

It is just not the way that my mind thinks

But every now and again --- a poem gets stuck in my brain.

“The Second Coming” by WB Yeats is one of them.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

There are so many things in this poem that catch my attention.

The overtly religious language and images are stunning.

But there are a couple of particular images from Yeats that grab me.

When “The Second Coming” was written, much of the world had grown disillusioned.

While the 20<sup>th</sup> Century had ushered in new and wonderful inventions –

Automobile

Airplane

Mass manufacturing

Things seemed on the verge of chaos

Throughout the world revolutions were popping up

the Russian Revolution of 1917,

the Irish Easter Uprising of 1916,

and, of course, the First World War (1914-1918)

Nothing before could compare to the devastation that was the First World War

My grandfather was never the same after he returned from Europe

And of course, there was the Spanish Flu that mirrors our COVID pandemic

It was into this environment that Yeats composed this provocative poem.

It is easy to understand how some could easily believe that the second coming must be at hand and the world was to end shortly.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

We can read so much into this today that would have never crossed WB Yeats' mind.

Things in our denomination, and in our country seem to be falling apart.

We are divided over --- it seems --- everything

Vaccinations

Mask mandates

Whether we should close in person worship

What happened a year ago on January 6<sup>th</sup>

What role the LGBTQI+ should play in the institutional church

Without the center --- Yeats suggests thing cannot hold together

If we all run to one side or the other --- everything collapses

The right and the left --- need each other

Without the center everything is out of balance

While I am drawn to the first part of the poem it is the second that offers us hope:

Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out

When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*

Troubles my sight

Spiritus Mundi is defined in many ways  
Some call it the soul of the Universe

While others suggest  
A world spirit

Yeats seems to be suggesting that there is a universal memory and a 'muse' of sorts that provides inspiration

For me --- Spiritus Mundi is the universal Christ that Father Richard Rohr calls us to recognize.

Rohr writes:

We really were made for love, and outside of love we die very quickly. . . . We Christians aren't more loving than anyone else; sometimes, we're even less loving than other people! In some ways, that's inevitable if we're basically relating to God out of fear, and we haven't been drawn into the love between the Father and the Son by the Spirit.

Jesus says the Spirit is always the hardest to describe, because "the Spirit blows where it will" (see John 3:8). Jesus' message to us is clear: don't ever try to control the Spirit and say where it comes from, where it goes, or who has it. It's called group narcissism whenever we say our group is the only one that has the Spirit or the Truth. Every group at less mature levels will try to put God in their own pocket and say God only loves their group. Such a belief has nothing to do with the love of God. It isn't a search for Truth or Holy Mystery, but a search for control. It's the search for the small self, the search to make myself feel superior and to stand alone. I'm not in control or in charge of this Holy Mystery. I don't presume to understand. All I know is I'm forever being drawn—through everything—each manifestation (epiphany) calling for surrender, communion, and intimacy.

I believe that God's Spiritus Mundi --- God's universal spirit is calling out to all of us to make room for the other.

And our failure to do that --- will bring the whole house down.

If we --- individually or collectively --- become convinced that we have God's TRUTH figured out --- and that we are the dispensers of that truth --- the result will be that we will push God's Children away.

It is what we are seeing with the rise of the "nones"

We need each other  
Conservative and liberal  
Republican and democrat

We need to learn and grow from each other and experience the Spiritus Mundi of God.

I have a favorite peanuts cartoon  
“What if your wrong?”

May we open our hearts and our church to all of God’s children.

I am with you. {God says}  
From the east I’ll bring your children;  
from the west I’ll gather you.  
I’ll say to the north, “Give them back!”  
and to the south, “Don’t detain them.”  
Bring my sons from far away,  
and my daughters from the end of the earth,  
everyone who is called by my name  
and whom I created for my glory,  
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