

still waters

home church studies

Isaiah 43.1-7

[Worship]

1 But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. 3 For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. 4 Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. 5 Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; 6 I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth--7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

Consider:

[Words]

The biblical writers, in a rich variety of ways, confess that God is giving a newness. That newness from God is the center of Hebrew Testament faith. And for Christians, the life of Jesus is the quintessential exhibit of God's newness in the world. Three things strike me about that constant assertion of God's newness.

First, it is beyond explanation and beyond our own conjuring. It depends wholly upon God. Second, the Bible is concerned with the community that receives, trusts in, and embraces the miracle of newness. It knows that this community, synagogue, and church is summoned to a radical way of obedience in the world, a way so radical that it evokes the hostility of the world. But third, those vexed by such a summons turn to God in hope and trust, that God will overrule such hostility.

It strikes me that these texts, especially in the season of Epiphany, are stunningly contemporary for us. The world in its fearful anxiety grows more hard-hearted and violent. Clearly, such a bent can never lead to well-being. The question is how that vicious cycle of deathliness can be broken? The answer given here is that it is broken when a community boldly acts in response to God's self-giving jubilee. The ground for enacting jubilee in our world is baptism, entry into an alternative existence that is not beholden to the old orders of death.

Walter Bruggemann



[Scripture]

Luke 3.15-17, 21-22

15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 16 John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."