

I'd stretched out my spring break trip to Southern Cal as long as possible, and it was time to head back to campus to finish my junior year.

My plan was to hitchhike the 300 miles from Ventura to San Jose, then hook up with a college buddy for the last 800 miles of the journey.

It was Friday, mid-April, as I stood on the onramp to Highway 101, my thumb held high.

The low ceiling of clouds hugging the coast, mixed with exhaust fumes from passing traffic, gave the air a quality of denseness.

The sun wasn't down yet, but soon would be, and I knew that when it became dark, my chances of catching a ride would diminish greatly.

So I hoped—and prayed—that someone would have pity. And before long a guy in a pickup pulled over and I hopped in.

As we headed north, I learned that the driver, having worked a construction job in L.A. all week, was heading home to San Louis Obispo—120 miles up the road.

When we reached Santa Barbara, he exited 101 and pointed his pickup toward the coastal range; a **SHORTCUT**, he said, that would cut precious time off the trip.

Springtime that year had brought generous rains, and as we wove our way up through the foothills you could see evidence of it everywhere in the carpet of green that graced the slopes.

Finally rising above the clouds, we found ourselves in full view of the setting sun. Its rays cast shadows on the hills below and above—lighting up the grass-lined meadows, the leafing oaks and blooming orchards with a golden hue that took my breath away.

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing.
They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.*

The whole natural world, says Isaiah, is a recipient of—participates in—God's promised transformation!

*Waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;
The burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.*

Woven top to bottom through this prophetic oracle are IMAGES alternating between the NATURAL WORLD and the HUMAN SPHERE – LINKING THEM AS IF they were inseparably connected, AS IF they were, in fact, ONE.

WHAT DO THESE IMAGES TELL US?

- That God's dream for this Earth is bigger than just the human story.
- That God's dream for this Earth encompasses more than human liberation.

If ADVENT is a season of HOLY DISRUPTION then one thing that needs to be DISRUPTED is the notion that you and I occupy a special sphere of influence which allows us to operate separately and apart from the rest of creation...

...That HUMAN ways of being are, by rights, more privileged than other ways of being.

The further we move into the ANTHROPOCENE EPOCH, the further human acts and choices push natural systems out of balance, the more it becomes clear that we need a HOLY DISRUPTION and need it BAD.

Some would say these images in chapter 35 are PREPOSTEROUS ones. That these images of a world transformed are EXAGGERATIONS; HYPERBOLE.

John, the desert prophet, wonders as much in today's gospel.

**From prison he sends a cluster of disciples to Jesus, to ask:
ARE YOU THE ONE, OR ARE WE TO WAIT FOR ANOTHER?**

What we can intuit from that question is that John had expectations about the Messiah that, apparently, were not being met.

**Remember what John, in his preaching, had prophesied of the coming Messiah? (ch. 3)
THE AX IS LYING AT THE ROOT OF THE TREES; EVERY TREE THEREFORE THAT DOES NOT BEAR GOOD FRUIT IS CUT DOWN AND THROWN INTO THE FIRE.**

**Remember his "take no prisoners" approach to dealing with the religious hierarchy?
YOU BROOD OF VIPERS, he'd shouted, WHO WARNED YOU TO FLEE FROM THE WRATH THAT IS TO COME! BEAR FRUIT WORTHY OF REPENTANCE!**

Fast forward to chapter 11, where John is sitting in prison with plenty of time for life review. He's heard reports about what Jesus is up to, and some of those reports don't jibe with what he thought was supposed to happen.

If the AX, as John said, was lying at the root of the trees, Jesus seems to lack the ability to swing.¹

Instead of gathering around him the same kind of no-holds-barred, desert tested, single-minded followers John has, Jesus, the rumors say, associates with all sorts of ribble rabble—the illiterate, the mentally unstable, the morally and sexually impure—even tax collectors—find a place in his company.

His power to heal and forgive is important and is generating for Jesus a significant following, but John seems to expect the Christ to be doing much more.

Caught in a kind of cognitive dissonance, John sends disciples to ask Jesus, point blank:

ARE YOU THE ONE, OR ARE WE TO WAIT FOR ANOTHER?

And how does Jesus respond?

He brings the language of Isaiah into the conversation, and with it, a **NEW LENS for understanding what's going on.²**

Go tell John what you hear and see:

the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.

For Jesus, Isaiah's words are not just poetic metaphor—they offer substantive proof that DIVINE FINGERPRINTS are all over his ministry.

By his actions, Jesus breathes new life into Isaiah's prophecy, and those words – which held the hopes and longings of generations—start singing again.

AND WHAT IS THE HOPE THEY BRING?

That Transformation is possible. That change can happen.

That the **CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE will not abandon us to oblivion, but is with us for the long haul.**

For if the Infinite One can become the Finite, Vulnerable One, helpless and needy, wrapped in bands of cloth, then anything is possible.

¹ Montague Williams, *The Christian Century*, December 2022, p. 25. This paragraph, and some that follow borrow from his insights.

² Ibid.

If the Suffering Servant—EMBRACING OBLIVION ITSELF on the cross—can be RAISED UP on the Third Day, than anything is possible.

Transformation is possible—for Earth, for humanity—because our companion, our Christ, is a Crucified and Risen Lord...

—whose resurrected life is bent ever and always upon

- **disrupting death,**
- **disrupting greed,**
- **disrupting lethargy,**
- **disrupting despair....**

and offering us the RENEWED life, the RESURRECTION life needed for the world to be made whole.

That movement, that journey, starts here at the Table, where Christ says once more:

I OFFER YOU MY LIFE, THAT YOU MAY HAVE LIFE...

I OFFER MY LIFE, THAT YOU MAY BE LIFE FOR THE WORLD.

Amen.