

The prophet Isaiah was speaking to Israel in the aftermath of the Babylonian exile. Many of the people had been deported to Babylon and had now returned to Jerusalem-others had stayed behind and managed to eke out an existence-and the two groups were not fond of each other. They were a people divided-angry, accustomed to the pointing of the finger, to hateful speech. Accustomed to some having more than they need and some having nothing. And if that wasn't bad enough, those inflicting pain and hoarding resources were doing so while hiding behind the cloak of religion.

And in the midst of all of this, they, God's chosen people, peppered God with questions: Why is it that we pray, fast, and humble ourselves but you don't seem to notice? Why are we so divided? Why is there a gulf between what we ask you for and what the world looks like? Where are you God?" Boy, do these questions resonate today. I have prayed daily for an end to gun violence, yet the news is filled with reports of shootings. I have prayed for an end to white supremacy, yet that unGodly ideology is growing and white supremacists are getting bolder. I have prayed for an end to the hateful rhetoric we hear from certain government officials, political pundits and "news" on the tv, and yet it seems to be getting louder. The divides,

breaches, in our common life are numerous and growing. Some of us eat well while ever increasing numbers of others go hungry. Some of us have far more than we need while some have nothing. Our streets, like those of Isaiah's Jerusalem, are not safe for too many of us, especially those who are black or brown. We are separated by race, class, education, political affiliation, and religion. Our social and cultural contexts are vastly different. We are a people of divisions, breaches.

As with Isaiah's people many, perhaps all, of our breaches are at root our failure, our refusal, to see those who are different from us as equal, as children of God. Breaches formed by our limited and limiting understanding of God and Creation.

And yet we, with Isaiah's people, look to God and say, "look at us God, we are saying lovely prayers, we are showing up at church on Sunday morning.. most of the time. And we have been doing this for months, years on end. Surely this is enough to please you- to get you to show up and fix this mess". And through Isaiah God's answer is, "Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins." Apparently God is not thrilled with sackcloth and ashes, weeping and wailing, kneeling at prayer desks and standing next to the altar. God's question to the people Israel

was-where are you and what are you doing? Why aren't you helping those without homes, feeding the hungry, bathing the lepers, and marching with the Black Lives Matter movement? Why aren't you working with refugees or at the clinic with someone waiting for gender reassignment surgery? Why are you not out there comforting and afflicting- reminding the oppressed that they are beloved children of God who have inherent dignity and deserve justice- and reminding the wealthy that they are dust? Why are you not doing away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk-which is where most of these breaches begin? It can be, as the Rev. Traci Blackmon says, sometimes very difficult to tell that those of us who publicly claim to be Christian are followers of an Afro-Semitic Palestinian from the wrong side of the tracks.

And God says, don't look to me, it is *you* I have appointed to be repairers of the breach. If you make the decision to stop oppressing others, if you decide to stop blaming other people, if you stop using hateful rhetoric and pointing the finger, if you decide to feed the hungry, to meet the needs of the neediest, then, then I will make you strong and guide you and you will have all that you need to do the work you are doing and you, you will be

called the rebuilders of what is broken, repairers of the breach, and restorers of streets to live in.

What Isaiah is talking about is a theology of resistance-resistance to those forces within and around us that set us against each other, resistance to injustice. This theology holds a spiritual and moral understanding of justice that is rooted in the belief that the structure of the universe is on the side of justice. That there is a higher law than human law, moral laws that we cannot violate with impunity any more than we can violate physical laws with impunity, and that to violate moral law causes a breach in our relationship with God and renders us unable to speak on God's behalf. It holds that we cannot have right relationship with God without doing all we can to have a right relationship with our neighbor-especially the weakest, poorest, least likable, and most vulnerable of them.

We have imagined a God of favoritism- who has chosen my well being, my security, over that of other parts of God's creation. This theology not only allows us to avoid self examination and turning to a new way, but it allows room for complacency, for waiting around for God, because we can interpret the conditions of our current society as the consequence of evil (can't be our fault, we're the good guys, right?) rather than of apathy and

inaction. Isaiah is saying it is not faithful to hide our self-interest and inaction under cloaks of feigned righteousness. Not faithful to say a prayer for those who are hurting and not live a prayer. Not faithful to post on facebook and never get our hands dirty. Not faithful to provide charity and resist change. Not faithful to refuse to engage in those acts that will heal our personal and communal areas of brokenness. Not faithful to avoid speaking truth to power where there is injustice. Not faithful to languish in the breaches of our own making. And while it all feels overwhelming and hopeless, we are not a people without hope. Not a people called to adapt to evil, to brokenness. We are not called to rest content in the breach waiting for an extraordinary person to come along or waiting for God to fix it. We, we, are called to BE repairers of the breach using what God has already done and already given us.

I know we see around us a world that rewards, celebrates breach makers. And it is easy, far too easy, to become residents of the breach rather than repairers. As divisions among us harden, more resources siphoned from those in need and hoarded by those with plenty, as our national discourse descends further into coarseness and insults shouted at each other from our corners, into violence, it is easy to forget our shared humanity, easy to

fall into anger and despair, easy to lose hope. So we must hang on with all our strength, we must look for repairers- because they are in our midst- look around this room and you will see some lurking right here. We must look for glimmers of light, of hope, of resistance. We must *be* givers of grace and love-recognizing that repairing breaches often begins with words- with small personal actions, with laughter, with a well placed question or a small gesture. It begins in our everyday lives as we interact with others and make decisions, consciously or not, about how we respond to others. Do we share that mean spirited post on facebook or not? Even if it is taking a shot at an injustice, is it shining a spotlight on that injustice or is it attacking the dignity of another human being? As the Quakers would say, when considering saying anything: "Is it true? Is it from love? Is it necessary?" I want to be clear, I am not saying we should not confront evil and injustice, as followers of Christ, we must. But we cannot confront evil and injustice by dehumanizing others. We cannot, to paraphrase Nietzsche, become a monster to defeat the monster.

We are not all going to be the next Martin Luther King Jr. or Sister Mary Scullion, but we are all called to be imitators of Christ- which means living and acting from a place of respect for the dignity of others, from a place of

love. Faithfulness requires more than thoughts and prayers, more than ritualistic actions, it requires behavior that strives for reparation. It requires *us* to break the yoke, stop the pointing of the finger, feed the hungry, care for the needy. Then, then the Lord will guide us and satisfy us with good things. Then, then, you shall be called a repairer of the breach, and you shall be like a spring whose waters never fail.