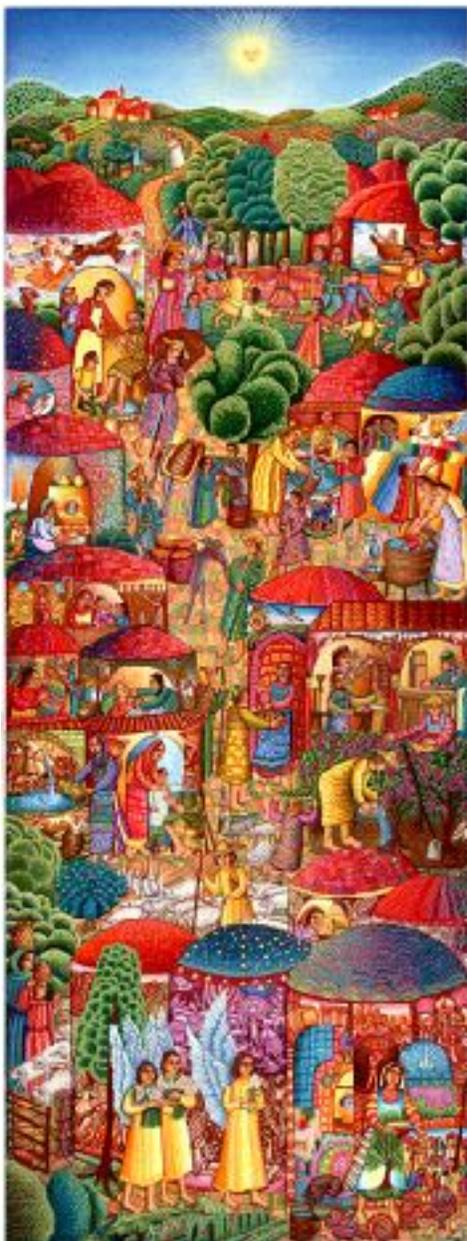


## Deep Listening

*May we hear the fullness of your story within us and in each other and embody your love. Help us to heal the fabric of our humanity by listening to your creation and following in your ways, through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen*



### Singing Earth

For you shall go out in joy,  
and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall burst into song,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their  
hands. (Isaiah 55:12)

In the passage from the prophet Isaiah,  
the Earth is *singing*.

And the Earth is singing a *story*.

And there is *hope* in this story.

For Isaiah, the Word of God is grounded in the Earth. And by hearing the Word in creation all around us, and remembering that we are born into a creation that is already and always singing, we are participants in this hope.<sup>1</sup>

We become instruments of God's Word.

Yet, somehow this larger, cosmic story, with hills that sing and trees that clap their hands, feels far away from, even out of sync with, the mundane and gritty moments of the human world in which we find ourselves: in our country, in our society, in this global pandemic; and in our relationships, our

<sup>1</sup>“A Visit” by John August Swanson. Made available by “Art in the Christian Tradition” from [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#).

work, and our daily lives. And, now that weeks have passed since the day of Pentecost, it can be difficult to imagine new possibilities for ourselves and our world.<sup>2</sup> Taking the time to listen to the Earth can even seem like a distraction from our larger purpose and calling; as if we are going on a walk or hike or a bike ride just to get away.

But, of course, the song of the Earth that Isaiah describes is not far away or out of sync with us. Rather, our lives and the ways in which we have constructed our human society have become distant from the Word and the promise of God in creation.

## Consciousness

In this time of *pan*-demic we are developing or maybe re-discovering our sense of *pan*-consciousness. It seems like we are being called to re-enter into this deeper consciousness. And to listen, really, really listen to the stories and the voices within our collective humanity.

“We are discovering a wisdom,” as Brian McClaren writes, “that we needed all along, and that wisdom is that we are all connected. We are not separate...” Before the pandemic, we used to get sick as individuals, but now we realize that we get sick as households, which become sick as part of our communities, which become sick as part of our cities, our states and our nations. “We realize now that our whole species can become infected, and that our whole globe can be changed because of our interconnectedness...”<sup>3</sup>

And along with this emerging global consciousness, there is the realization that many of us can be transmitting another kind of virus by being a privileged human being, that we have participated in a great systemic sickness that has hurt and oppressed so many, and that we can be complicit in this not-knowing and not-seeing. And to reverse the sickness and allow for collective healing, we need to change how we are to live and to be.

Yesterday I was thinking about this consciousness that was rising up. I was sitting inside, and the rain started to fall. After a moment, the sun came back. But then the rain started to fall again suddenly, this time for a long time and with great force. And it became dark. The rain was falling so heavily against the roof that it thundered through the walls and structure of my home, and through my own body, until I could hear nothing else and I could do nothing else but *listen*. And, as the rain continued and the energy of it was moving around and through me, body and soul, I read the passage from Isaiah again:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and do not return there until they have watered the earth...  
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10-11)

And I realized that the rain truly was, as Isaiah proclaims, *accomplishing* something. Flooding the world, filling the soil, bringing the earth into new life, it was telling the story of God's Word. And my own body had become a kind of cosmic, musical instrument - even as I was sitting inside.

## Discipleship

Our response to this extraordinary time depends perhaps in large part on our capacity to listen, to listen deeply, and for stories that need to be heard, to be really heard.

There is in this listening the work of decolonizing our own minds.

It is a time of re-imagining, for what has formed our imagination has formed our lives, symbols, and the ways in which we have structured and organized our society.<sup>4</sup>

It is a time of reckoning.

Robin DiAngelo, the author of the book *White Fragility*, said in a recent interview: "It's so easy to see where we swim against the current and so much harder to see where we move with the current.... to notice, what injustice have I perpetuated, and how have I benefited?"<sup>5</sup>

And there is the importance, for those who are privileged, of resting in the discomfort, and not moving out of this discomfort but, rather, more deeply into it.

There is importance of naming, naming what is unjust and oppressive, and in reaching for words that are plain and straightforward. As Nadia Bolz Webber in a prayer, "Give us words that are not empty affirmation, but give us strong words, as real as the very soil from which you raised us."<sup>6</sup>

In the Gospel passage today, in the parable about the seed and the sower, Jesus uses words immersed in creation-centered language and meaning. As Jesus tells the story

about the seed that falls on the good soil, he proclaims, “Let anyone with ears listen!” (Matt 13:9). And he say to ‘listen’ and to ‘hear the word of God’ over and over again.

And Jesus reminds us that, in order to hear the word of God that is sown in the good soil, we need to be *rooted*. We need to do that great work of growing into ourselves, into the depth of our consciousness that touches the depth of our collective human and earthly consciousness.

This is a great, interior story. A great human story that we carry within us.

Resmaa Menakem, the therapist and specialist on trauma, especially racialized trauma, writes that “While we see anger and violence in the streets of our country, the real battlefield is inside our bodies. If we are to survive as a country, it is inside our bodies where this conflict will need to be resolved.”<sup>7</sup> And, he says, we need to settle into our bodies in a new way, and to do this collectively.<sup>8</sup>

And in this embodiment with our collective selves, we are coming from Creation, we are part of Creation, and we are emerging within Creation.<sup>9</sup>

In this time of emergence and transformation, when we gather as a church and worship in new and creative ways, and we long to be present to one another, I have been wondering, what does it mean to follow Jesus?

How do we pursue that deep interior work within, to repair the fabric of our consciousness, to discover and name our own participation in, and benefit from. the suffering and oppression of others, and to listen to the voices and stories that must be heard in order for healing to take place?

What does it mean to be a disciple, to listen, to name, to act, to re-imagine, to dwell within the discomfort, to give up much more than we are comfortable giving up, to drop everything and follow?

## **A Pivotal Moment**

It feels like we are at a pivotal moment within the rising collective consciousness of our humanity. And we know already, as Isaiah knew so long ago, the true story, the full human and earthly story in which all are loved as they are and all live and flourish as God created them to be.

We are committed to that story. Even in the midst of a world that doesn't hear it, we claim as followers of Christ that we hear it.

If God's creation gives us the chance to hear the bigger story, and to see our place in it, and if the things that were invisible we can now see, then we can respond to where we are in this moment.

Isn't this a good and beautiful thing, no matter how hard it is, to do our part with one's whole being and with persistence?

Is this not what we are made for, this great awakening, and to do our part, no matter how hard or seemingly invisible, even if it takes the rest of our lives?

Wendell Berry wrote that "If one's sight is clear and if one stays on and works well, one's love gradually responds to the place as it really is, and one's visions gradually image possibilities that are really in it.... at last one sees where one is."<sup>10</sup>

It is difficult, and it will require generational and collective effort, for a long time and certainly for our life times. And yet we are not doing this alone. The cosmic music is already and always flowing through us, sent from the mouth of God, the language of the universe, resonating through our bodies and the ways in which we embody the world around us. The word of God is falling, like the rain is falling this morning, bringing forth, sprouting, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater (Isaiah 55:10). And, as Isaiah proclaims, it is accomplishing something (Isaiah 55:11).

Even if we really are out of sync, and our bodies are tied in knots, and our collective body consciousness is in a state of pandemic, trauma, ignorance, what we do matters.

And it is practical. As Resmaa Menakem says, "Our everyday lives present us with endless opportunities to heal—through the things we say and do, the harmful things we are able to not say and do, and the ways in which we treat ourselves and others. We all have the capacity to heal—and to create room for others to heal. Our relationships, communities, and circumstances all call us into this healing."<sup>11</sup>

As followers of Christ, we do the seemingly small work of sowing within the darkness of the soil, committing a lifetime to this work, knowing we may not ever see the cathedral we are helping to build. Yet we can add one stone to this cathedral of hope, knowing that our little part is enough to make a difference and that it is essential.

And so let us take part in this pivotal moment, this earthly tremor in the soul of our humanity, where rain and snow and cosmic movement resonate with the body of

Christ, where the seed of God's Word falls on the soil and takes root, revealing the abundance of God's love and the beauty of the gospel of Christ.

Amen.

## Readings

### Isaiah 55:10-13

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.  
For you shall go out in joy,  
and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall burst into song,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.  
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;  
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;  
and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,  
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

### Psalm 65:9-14

9 You visit the earth and water it abundantly;  
you make it very plenteous; \*  
the river of God is full of water.  
10 You prepare the grain, \*  
for so you provide for the earth.  
11 You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges; \*  
with heavy rain you soften the ground and bless its increase.  
12 You crown the year with your goodness, \*  
and your paths overflow with plenty.  
13 May the fields of the wilderness be rich for grazing, \*  
and the hills be clothed with joy.  
14 May the meadows cover themselves with flocks,  
and the valleys cloak themselves with grain; \*  
let them shout for joy and sing.

### **Matthew 13:1-9,18-23**

Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying:

“Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!”

“Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

<sup>1</sup> “Any clear vision of the future starts with hope. Pentecost is a story about hope. Now some weeks after Pentecost, to think and imagine new possibilities beyond our present circumstances remains a challenge to most mainline churches in the United States. Often the excitement of Pentecost is defused when we are faced with the complexity of life circumstances. Hope must be more than a mountaintop experience with the Spirit. It must be grounded in the concrete realities of both heaven and earth. This passage in Second Isaiah reflects an understanding of hope inspired by moments of transcendence in the context of everyday struggles of human existence.” John L. Thomas, Jr. in *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season after Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16)*. Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition; Location 7340.

<sup>2</sup> John L. Thomas, Jr. in *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season after Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16)*. Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition; Location 7340.

<sup>3</sup> Brian McClaren, “Our Spiritual Health,” Center for Action and Contemplation, July 9, 2020, <https://cac.org/our-spiritual-health-2020-07-09/>.

<sup>4</sup> Jason Reynolds, “Jason Reynolds – Fortifying Imagination,” The On Being Project, accessed July 11, 2020, <https://onbeing.org/programs/jason-reynolds-fortifying-imagination/>.

<sup>5</sup> Robin DiAngelo, “Robin DiAngelo and Resmaa Menakem: In Conversation,” The On Being Project, accessed July 10, 2020, <https://onbeing.org/programs/robin-diangelo-and-resmaa-menakem-in-conversation/>.

<sup>6</sup> Nadia Bolz-Weber, “I’m Dabbling in Compassion,” accessed July 11, 2020, <https://nadiabolzweber.substack.com/p/im-dabbling-in-compassion>.

<sup>7</sup> Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Central Recovery Press, 2017); Kindle Edition; p. xvii.

<sup>8</sup> “... part of our civilizational work, our national work, our political work, is to, each of us, settle in our bodies in a new way. And then the image that I love is that we have to settle in our bodies together, collectively.” “Resmaa Menakem — ‘Notice the Rage; Notice the Silence,’” The On Being Project, accessed July 10, 2020, <https://onbeing.org/programs/resmaa-menakem-notice-the-rage-notice-the-silence/>.

<sup>9</sup> “I think what it means to be human is to realize that we’re ever-emerging and that that — that we are not machines. We are not flesh machines; we are not robots; we come from and are part of Creation, and that that cannot just be something we talk about when we go to a yoga retreat; that it has to be a lived, emergent ethos and that — one of my ancestors, Dr. King, talked about how, when people who love peace have to organize as well as people who love war. And for me, what that means is that it’s about work. It’s about action. It’s about doing. It’s about pausing. It’s about allowing — the reason why we want to heal the trauma of racialization is that it thwarts the emergence. So let’s not do that. Let’s condition and create cultures that will allow that emergence to reign supreme so that the intrinsic value can supersede the structural value.” Resmaa Menakem in “Resmaa Menakem — ‘Notice the Rage; Notice the Silence,’” The On Being Project, accessed July 10, 2020, <https://onbeing.org/programs/resmaa-menakem-notice-the-rage-notice-the-silence/>.

<sup>10</sup> “If one’s sight is clear and if one stays on and works well, one’s love gradually responds to the place as it really is, and one’s visions gradually image possibilities that are really in it. Vision, possibility, work, and life—all have changed by mutual correction. Correct discipline, given enough time, gradually removes one’s self from one’s line of sight. One works to better purpose then and makes fewer mistakes, because at last one sees where one is. Two human possibilities of the highest order thus come within reach: what one wants can become the same as what one has, and one’s knowledge can cause respect for what one knows.” Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba, 1 edition (Washington, D.C: Counterpoint, 2003); p. 187.

<sup>11</sup> Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Central Recovery Press, 2017); Kindle Edition; p. 305.