group Bible Study – February 21, 2007

Read Isaiah chapters 49-59

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“Sing for joy, O heavens, and exalt, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the LORD has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones.” (Is. 49:13)

This is a promise from God – not yet a reality. In these chapters of Isaiah’s prophecy, God speaks words of hope to his suffering people. The word is this: the day is coming when all will be made right. The suffering and the injustice will end, “then all flesh shall know that I am the LORD your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob” (Is. 49:26).

Throughout the centuries, this message has been at the heart of God’s word to his people. Over and over in Christian and Jewish sources alike we are urged to trust, trust, trust: because even though we may suffer for a time, God has promised something new. We and the whole world around us will be changed. And it’s just on the horizon now – we can see the first rays of that new day shining in the darkness. The morning is coming; the night is going.

In the 1300s, Julian of Norwich wrote about a series of visions or ‘showings’ that she received. (In writing about these visions, by the way, Julian became the first published female author in the English language.) In the thirteenth vision she heard Jesus say to her that “all manner of thing shall be made well.” These words of hope came after an intense vision of the suffering of Jesus on the cross. How are these things connected – this suffering and hope?

They are connected in the same way that the season of Lent is connected to Easter. In this season we remind ourselves that we are weak and broken. We recognize the suffering around us and in us. We look at our own sin and the ways we have failed. We commit ourselves again to discipline and humility in the Way of Jesus… and we do all this because we know that Easter is coming.

Easter is the foundation of all our hope. On that most holy of all Christian days we remember the one day when the dead man Jesus was raised to new life and declared to be the master of the dead and the living both. On that day, something radically new happened – the first rays of morning broke through the night of human history. The raising of this one man, this Jesus Christ, signaled the beginning of a whole new world – or, as the New Testament authors describe it, a new creation. The morning is coming; the night is going.

Life today is Lent – and in a world of suffering, we discipline ourselves to follow that difficult path and to carry our cross. But that’s OK, because after this world of Lent comes the world of Easter. Until that new creation is everywhere, until God’s Spirit fills and completes this world, we wait in hope. And we wait in obedience:

“Thus says the LORD: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed.” (Is. 56:1)