



Sunday, Dec. 9, 2018

Disruptions Can Reconnect Us to Who We Are
Pastor Jason Bryan-Wegner

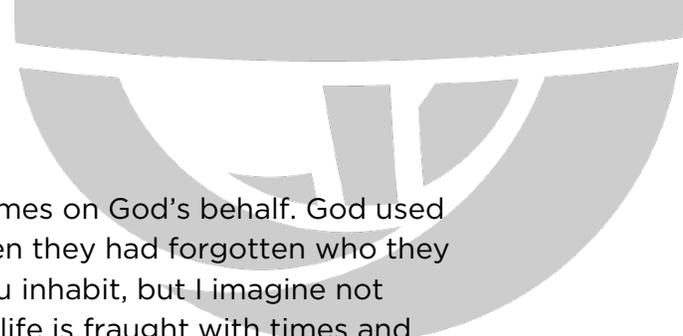
Isaiah 42:1-9 NRSV

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ²He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

⁵Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: ⁶I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, ⁷to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. ⁸I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. ⁹See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

Have you ever been far from home and not known how to get back? I'm not talking about a wrong turn or having a bad navigator. I'm talking about being far from the home that is YOU. Far from that spark, that connection to the One who lovingly made you, you. If you have, you're not alone. Truth be told, when most people end up in a place like this it takes them a while to realize it. But being lost is sometimes the very disruption you need to be whole again, to be you again.

I'm Isaiah, a prophet of the Most High God. Back in my day, prophets played a pretty important role in guiding the affairs of God's people. Chief among them was ensuring that people never forgot that their lives were inextricably connected to Yahweh. I can't say that I was always successful. But it never stopped me from trying.



I consulted with kings and rulers and spoke many times on God's behalf. God used prophets when people seem particularly lost or when they had forgotten who they were. I don't know much about you or the world you inhabit, but I imagine not much has changed. People are people after all, and life is fraught with times and places where we so easily take a wrong turn, shall we say.

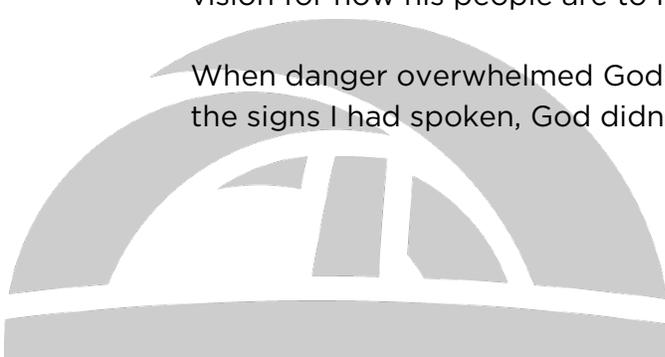
Young people have run headlong into the world with more bravado than wisdom and found any number of ways to reject or ignore who God has made them. People have looked for love for all the wrong reasons, and some days ended up not recognizing themselves from the other. Others have believed the allure of material wealth and power were adequate substitutes for faithfulness to God and care for others. Now, I'm just telling you what I've seen. Again, I don't know what life is like for you in your day. But maybe it's not all that different.

In my day, there were consequences for failing to remember who you were, and to whom you belonged. Judgments were pronounced. Kingdoms were toppled. And when people rebelled and completely forgot who they were, there was exile. My people ended up far from home, both literally and figuratively.

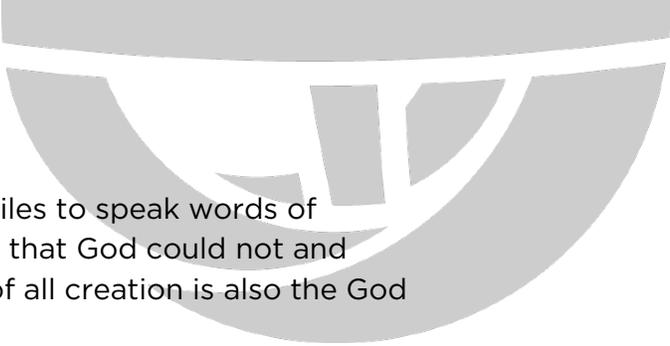
It sounds bad, I know. Homes were destroyed. The Temple was ransacked. The nation's leaders and elites were marched off to a foreign land. People's whole way of life was turned upside down. But as horrible as this was, it was the kind of disruption that the people needed to reconnect to who God made them to be.

In exile God's people worked for decades to reconstruct rituals and reestablish traditions that made sense to them given the new reality of their lives. And as they did, little by little, they remembered. They reconnected. And all along the way, God spoke through prophets – yes to warn – but also to encourage them and help them find a new way home.

I know what you're thinking. God used prophets mostly to voice God's anger and wrath for the wrongs people did. And maybe you think that a lot of those judgments were unwarranted, even outside the bounds of a benevolent God. I'll admit, I have definitely delivered my share of those kinds of messages. And I get it, there were times that God's warnings seemed a bit over the top – but what parent watches their beloved child run straight for fire or the edge of a cliff and doesn't say anything? At some point someone has to sound the alarm. As harsh as the warnings sound, they came because people are precious to God. And God has a vision for how his people are to live.



When danger overwhelmed God's people; when they plunged ahead ignoring all the signs I had spoken, God didn't abandon them. No, God went with them into



those lost places. God called prophets among the exiles to speak words of encouragement and hope. God reminded the people that God could not and would not be confined to the Temple, that the God of all creation is also the God of redemption and new life.

I tried again and again to help the people see this disruption as a chance to reconnect with who they were - that they were called to be light for the world. That they were chosen to bring forth justice and peace. And more than anything else, God spoke through me to remind them how much they were loved.

A word like this might cause anyone to sit up and pay attention when all seemed lost. Imagine what they thought when a word like this came from God: “Comfort, comfort my people. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid.”

At first, they were uncertain that it could really be true. Questions rose from the crowds, “What should we do now? Can we really go home? What about all that we’ve learned in exile?”

That’s when the Creator and created started working together to chart a new way home. God announced, “I am the Lord I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you. You are a covenant to the people, a light to the nations!” And the people responded, “After all this time, we remember. We are God’s chosen, this is who we are. This is how we find our way home.”

Truth be told, many of them never went home to Jerusalem, but they know better now than they did before who they are, and to whom they belong. Perhaps prophets don’t get the same attention in your day as they did back in Babylon. If they did, you’d probably lock them up or ignore them. It was known to happen sometimes, even back then.

If you are feeling lost, like somewhere along the line your connection to the One who lovingly created you vanished from your map. Do not despair. Admit you’re lost and keep looking. Keep hoping. Remember God does not abandon you when you get lost. God doesn’t give up on you when you’ve forgotten who you are. God comes again and again into the places where we’ve forgotten, so that we can remember again. God forgets and forgives how you’ve gotten there, “See, the former things have come to pass.” God declares, “and a new thing is dawning.”

Getting lost is part of life. Most likely it will happen to you more than once. But your times of exile, like those of old, may just be the very thing God will use to guide you to a new way home.

