

Isaiah 66:10-16

Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her— that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom. For thus says the Lord: I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bodies shall flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of the Lord is with his servants, and his indignation is against his enemies.

For the Lord will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to pay back his anger in fury, and his rebuke in flames of fire. For by fire will the Lord execute judgment, and by his sword, on all flesh; and those slain by the Lord shall be many.

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Living God, Awaken us to your irate penchant for justice... awaken us to your tenderness... hold us as we try to hold these together all at once in our true humanity... create in us hearts that can hold all that your heart holds living God... open us to your ways more and more... and we will follow you.

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I woke up yesterday morning and asked Jill what time it was, I'd been stirring over these words and over the bad news of another terrorist attack... I asked Jill what time it was. She said it was 9/11. Sounds about right.

Rejoice! Prosperity is on its way as a River flows... Oh that I might hold perpetually this felt sense: of a River of life flowing for all people, of the personhood of every human being, of the humanity of every living person -- Rejoice! Doesn't everybody have a mother one way or another... beloved in the Lord right up front I want to say -- the first word is God's last word -- rejoice for you shall be comforted...

Nevertheless, I'm going to begin with the disorienting and discomfiting verses. Because -- Nothing says home quite like a mass murder in the name of God. What on earth? Compassion says what!? Love requires what ? Before motherly words of comfort... perhaps some disruptive words of painful concern... flames of fire... a blazing sword...

Two Visions: One Mama -- --Comfort and Fire...

FIRE -- See them in painful Exile longing for home ... refugees know what it's like to be violently torn from their homes and forced into foreign lands... they were taken away and forced to live in the grip of oppression ... So Far from Home -- Imagine family life there in captivity... see famine emaciating your parents, your wife, your husband, your children... the bodies of your family members used as tools of pleasure and production by a power -- cruel and constant ... an ungodly power that could press every last living spark right out of you... by the waters of Babylon we lay down and wept... far too many lived and died in exile... but there is more to say...

In the context of Isaiah 66, the people had suffered through the exile, cut off from their land and from their God. Then, when some were allowed to return in anticipation of the great blessings they had been promised, they found only further suffering. The small groups of exiles who returned to Judah after Persia's defeat of Babylon in 539 faced hardship, famine, political violence, and economic oppression. Their weariness, after generations of oppression and

humiliation, must have been unbearable. Elizabeth Webb... Oh it does hurt so much more sometimes when you're hopeful...

Enter the voice of the PROPHET, a person through whom a compassionate living God could speak... ,...

To a person endowed with prophetic sight, everyone else appears blind; to a person whose ear perceives God's voice, everyone else appears deaf. No one is just; no knowing is strong enough, no trust complete enough. The prophet hates the approximate, he shuns the middle of the road.... Carried away by the challenge, the demand to straighten out man's ways, the prophet is strange, one-sided, an unbearable extremist.

Others may suffer from the terror of cosmic aloneness, the prophet is overwhelmed by the grandeur of divine presence.... --...While the world is at ease and asleep, the prophet feels the blast from heaven. -- Abraham Joshua Heschel

[Other really tough language in Isaiah 66] My children have chosen their own ways -- and in their abominations they take delight. I will give them over to their fears... when I called no one answered, when I spoke they did not listen... (nevertheless, nevertheless)

(6) A voice of noise, an uproar from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice from the LORD dealing out retribution to God's enemies.

Most of Isaiah 66 sounds like this... consider it my friends the sound of an irate mother... who comes in fire, who blasts straight in as a hurricane, to snatch them up and bear them away to safety... leaving nothing behind but a devastation...

Beloved Friends It Shall Be Known That God's Hand Is with God's Servants... AND Jesus never wanted to kill anyone ever no matter what... Jesus new exile just like you do...

Does this neighborhood know anything of exile? Raised hopes and deep disappointments? Economic oppression... does it know how quickly opium prescribed by doctors and produced by Pfizer can turn into addiction to heroin... do you know how easy it is for a hard-working person to find themselves one day on a bathroom floor at the train station, carried in to the ER by police... only to be released to go and take care of that on their own... Do the servants of God know any of the 3.5 million Americans who are homeless. How many folks struggling with mental illness are refugees trying to get home... that America has the highest rate of childhood poverty of any major developed country...

America now has more wealth and income inequality than any major developed country.

The top 1/10 of 1 percent owns as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent. Does this neighborhood know about hunger, generations of oppression, does this neighborhood not suffer the abomination of greed and limitless consuming... right in its very skin and bones! oh, Grand Rapids --some of us are eating so well... oh how very comfortable we are!... what a River of life you could be for the flourishing of so many!

The hand of the Lord is with his servants... are you ready to bring the fierce love of God, sharp as a sword, straight to the root of everything that is diminishing and disabling and demoralizing and demonic and dismissive and distracted... and degenerating... cut it clean, cut it down, cut it out

So much depends on what we do not cultivate, and as every loving mother knows ... so much depends on a loving mothers passionate sword... the one promising justice and comfort.

Here's a poem by Samuel Lake about what comes before the comfort... note: Sorghum is a kind of grass that needed to be cleared for a field to be restored to its abundance, this poet chopped it down on purpose to care for next seasons soil...

We planted it, tall and strong, immense and full like corn
And when It came mid-august, and the heat touched every part
Of our thoughts, we shattered our scythes and used our swords
To cut to the root of our own home, wrath and pungent green blood of plants
For it had to die, in our bones we knew it must be rent.
Sorghum grieves the death in its own home, but if not for
The giving of its flesh and the life in its sticky water laden body
What could be reborn? Where might a divine mother lay our infant body?
How could we ever nurse? Where could we dream?

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Comfort... my Beloved... all who love her, all who mourn for her now... are bound homeward to a new heaven and a new earth... prosperity flows to it and threw it like a River , ... I pray for you and for all of us alive called human, that we might make our way there -- and why not quickly... I pray for you to be found as one found in the lap of their mother... one carried along the way... one bouncing joyously on mamas knee... You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bodies shall flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of the Lord is with his servants.