



"APOCALYPSE'S ECONOMY"
SCRIPTURE: ISAIAH 43:16-21
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
Sunday, September 21, 2025
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Isaiah 43: 16-21

16 Thus says the Lord,
 who makes a way in the sea,
 a path in the mighty waters,
17 who brings out chariot and horse,
 army and warrior;
they lie down; they cannot rise;
 they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
18 Do not remember the former things
 or consider the things of old.
19 I am about to do a new thing;
 now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
 and rivers in the desert.
20 The wild animals will honor me,
 the jackals and the ostriches,
for I give water in the wilderness,
 rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,
21 the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

Apocalypse has its own economy, its own way of providing and its own way of taking.

An economy is a system of interaction and exchange, a mode of operation.

Apocalypse has its way of prioritizing, its own way of saving, its own way of reducing and producing.

Before we get to how apocalypse functions, let's review what is apocalypse is and is not again.

Last week we heard a lot of things that come up for people when they hear "apocalypse"-- a lot of heavy and scary things--the end times, damnation, judgment.

And with the help of the Prophet Isaiah, we got oriented to what apocalypse really is--it's an unveiling of the truth, of the present moment.

That doesn't mean apocalypse is easy by any stretch, but it does mean it's not what colonized Christianity and pseudo-Christianity as it is expressed in pop culture tells us it is.

We are living in apocalypse--in a time of unveiling of what we've struggled to see or didn't want to see or may have seen but denied it.

Apocalypses are collective, but they don't function the same for everyone. Some people have been seeing the truth for a long time about America. Others have resisted, denied, avoided. And still others violently have tried to obscure and gaslight us about the truth.

In this present moment in America, we are in an intense unveiling of what was already true but what was hard for people to see.

Even when the truth is unveiled, there are still ways that power and principalities create layers of distortion and contortion, they make it so people still can't see or don't want to see.

And that's how apocalypse can also bring with it a kind of foreboding--humans can have the truth unveiled and confronting us right in front of our eyes, and still not see it--that's part of the apocalypse--the part that shows us this bewildering penchant humans have for self-destruction and self-loathing. And so, apocalypse can bring with it a withering kind of sadness, grief, and fear that everything is unraveling.

If you see what apocalypse wants you to see, you can't unsee it. It changes you. If you don't see it or deny that it is happening, life gets harder and harder to make sense of--and that changes you, too. Either way, it can feel like something profoundly unsettling is happening.

That's why we are practicing some new ways to interact with apocalypse this fall--some new ways to see what it can yield, what it has to offer if we are willing to look at it and not try to deny it.

Cultivating apocalypse means actually engaging it as fertile ground for something nourishing, promising, even life-saving.

We're going to be hanging out in Isaiah a lot—not because Isaiah makes it easy for us to live in apocalypse, but because the writing in this prophetic book emerged from our ancestors who were living through multiple apocalypses. In fact, scholars see pretty obvious clues that the Book of Isaiah is actually written in three different time periods, the last two of which Isaiah probably wasn't even alive.

This book emerged from political, religious, and existential turmoil. War, conquest, the seizing of land, rulers vying for power and falling from grace, lives destroyed, mass deportations of groups of people based on their religious identity, even deportations of kings.

The passage we are using today from chapter 43 of Isaiah is from Second Isaiah. This is the part of the book when the voice of the prophet is encouraging the people who have been living in exile after the conquest of the Assyrians, now think about going back into the wilderness and try to return to Jerusalem (what is referred to as Zion in these pages), a place that will not look like it did when they left there a few generations ago. These speeches are exhortations for the people who have been living in exile to believe that they can now go back—and the reason they need to go back is because they are now living in the land of a different enemy—the Babylonians, who may well be meeting their defeat at the hands of still another aggressor.

This history is convoluted and full of kings rising and falling, some who only ruled for a few months before they were dethroned.

It was a time of upheaval and uncertainty, hardship and loss, adaptation and maybe even healing.

This part of Isaiah is encouraging the people to see things in a new way—to not fall into the scripts of the past, but to try something new, to see things anew.

“Do not remember the former things” is the prophetic invitation to not see this trek into the wilderness as just the same as last time.

This time God won't part the waters. This time God will change the whole ecosystem of the desert. This passage is like a new creation story. Isaiah has several of these sprinkled into

the apocalypse he is working out of—a new way of being that changes our biology, our topography, our normal ways of being.

This time the people don't have to murmur and complain; this time they can go forth in praise and joy.

See where you are with clearer eyes, see the journey to something new as a healing opportunity.

All this was put into motion politically because of King Cyrus coming to power and being a ruler who did not destroy indigenous practices. In fact, he passed a law that said the temple could be rebuilt in Jerusalem and the national treasury would pay for it.

Even though going back to Jerusalem included much desolation, the Prophet is encouraging people that there are promising possibilities.

But many of the Jews who lived in exile there in Babylon had assimilated, they had maintained their identity, their names, even practices. We don't really know how many opted to return to Jerusalem, but some of them did. And it turned out to be a pretty challenging reality they returned to in Jerusalem.

We live in the echoes of all these forced migrations and deportation in the world today. We still see these prophecies and expectations and trauma responses playing out.

Layers and layers of apocalypse—unveiling how human beings are, indeed, sometimes our own worst enemy and sometimes remarkably regenerative in extreme circumstances.

This passage in second Isaiah is really about the economy of apocalypse. The ways it gives and takes, the ways it requires receiving and releasing.

Both receiving and releasing have their own mini apocalypses built into them. Sometimes receiving can be the biggest challenge of all—especially we are fully engulfed in a trauma response that has conditioned us to react, fight, flee, fawn or freeze, especially when our bodies are conditioned not to trust, not to see, not to believe anything can change.

Just because it's hard, doesn't mean it isn't what we need to do. That's why we are cultivating, that's why we are lingering here in apocalypse to see what its gifts and its costs might be.

I wonder what the provisions are for you and for us in this apocalypse that we are living in? Our eyes are opened. For some we knew was true. It's what we've lived is true. What are the provisions when it becomes so clear. And what are we being invited to let go out When there's not the façade over it that makes us think. Maybe everything was sort of OK or should be OK or if we could just fix a few things here and there just tinker with the systems here and there then everything would be OK. If our democracy is crumbling Than how strong was it in the first place? What are we being asked by this apocalypse to release that might clear up energy or room or creativity for what was needed all along? And our collective answer to these questions starts with each of us having courage to answer them for ourselves. Where are your rivers in the desert? Maybe that that will help us see ours. What world that you found a way to live in or simulate to are you being asked to now leave behind or walk away from? You getting clarity on that will help us all get clarity on what we're being called to walk away from together.