

The Righteous Branch



Jeremiah prophesies about the emergence of “the righteous branch”. Most liberal Christians get a little twitchy about the word “righteous” because it can be interpreted as holier-than-thou. And yes, a certain expression of righteousness is off-putting. Jesus warns against

the righteousness of the Pharisees, for example—an outward expression of piety, public exhibitions of holiness, which come from the ego, and not the Kingdom of G_d.

But the righteous “branch” by definition is connected to the vine, or the Source. It is the part of the plant that will ultimately bear fruit, precisely because of this connection. And as the author of John’s gospel puts it, any branch that is not connected to the vine will be ultimately discarded – thrown in the fire. Not because of divine wrath, but because it is dead. This is the only “wrath” we experience coming from G_d, the hell of being disconnected from the Source of Life.

In truth, the world as we know it currently is living in this hell. The Paris and Beirut massacres are a manifestation of the violence of the false righteousness that Jesus warned against. ISIS is not the Righteous Branch that Jeremiah is talking about. But it’s inevitable that all religion and religious language will be clumped together in the wake of this religious violence. Even the metaphor of a “righteous branch” will be held in deep suspicion. And no doubt, ISIS believes itself to be that holy branch.

But those who perpetuate this kind of violence are already living in hell and spreading hellish hatred. They are poisoned by ideology that comes from a disconnected mind –

disassociated from the reality that is Love. And we would be mistaken to assume that this hell is isolated in religious fanatics.

Truthfully, the whole human race is either connected to Love, the realm that Jesus called the Kingdom of G_d, or not. Or to clarify, we are always connected, but trauma, emotional, psychological, physical, spiritual, causes us to feel disconnected. And when we feel disconnected, our misery creates misery. We who are miserable, create the world in our image, a world of misery.

The world as we know it, our lives as we know them, must be purged of this trauma. There is so much poison that is infecting us at a cellular level that needs to come out. This is the death inside of us that must be excised. When it is, we drop quite naturally back into the world of G_d. We see that all is beautiful. And we see that there is nothing more beautiful than those souls who are doing the work of allowing the poison to be removed. It is not a pretty sight when viewed through the lens of ego. But this work of –let’s call it what it is–repentance, is seen as a beautiful offering when viewed from the world of G_d.

“Repent”, cried Jesus, “for the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of G_d has drawn near. Repent, and believe in the good news (Mark 1:14, 15). Jesus picked up the mission of John the Baptist, who himself proclaimed and enacted a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (1:4). Liberal Christians have mistakenly downplayed or eliminated the need for repentance and the need for forgiveness of sin. Repentance is the key to entering the Kingdom of God.

What is meant by this is not that the Kingdom is some far off historical event that we are preparing for, but rather that is “very near”, very, very, near. It is like a veil, on the other side of which is the ever-present realm of Love. Truly, we can step through at any time. But only if we’ve done our work of

purging, of first seeing the poison that is infecting us, and allowing it to be removed. Then the veil is removed and we say to ourselves, astonished, "O G_d, you were always here."

The righteous branch consists of those people who have chosen to feel the pain of their trauma, to feel from within their own impurity. This is not an essential impurity, because we are manifestations of the consciousness of Love. But this Love has been stained. And the stain is truly sickening. Anybody who has not felt this and allowed for this "removal of sin" is not to be trusted. When we feel above this, we project our own impurity onto the world out there, and feel, not compassion but judgment. We deal with our disowned impurity (which is anything less than love) by obliterating the impurity we project on to others. We cast ourselves in the role of removing the impure from the face of the world – all in the name of righteousness. This is the fundamentalist mistake, and it looks like ISIS. It looks like all forms of religious fundamentalism.

But there truly is a Righteous Branch. It is formed by those who have looked within and seen how the power of darkness has ruled their life. It is formed of those souls who know that the path back to knowing this ever-present Love is the primary discipline of their life, and they are willing to face the profound grief of repentance. It is formed by those who have felt the depths of self-compassion for how much of their life has been lived disconnected from the vine, and the misery this has caused self and others. It is formed by those, who therefore, hold the broken, poisoned world, with the same compassion, and feel only love, only love for the world. It is formed by those who ask, as the work of their lives, to participate in the redemption of the trauma – not its perpetuation.

It is formed by those who inhabit and who are lived by this Love that Jesus called the Kingdom of G_d, and who know therefore that this Love will prevail. "The days are

surely coming when I will fulfill the promise” (Jeremiah 33:14). This Love actually does prevail. But it is awaiting fruition is the beautiful, broken world. The poison, the violence, the Empires that were built upon disconnection, will crumble and fall before this Love, because only this Love is actual. Those who know this and live it are the Righteous Branch.

Jeremiah 33:14-16

33:14 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

33:15 In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

33:16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness.”