



Lent reflection for February 17, 2024

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A reading from Ezekiel 39:21-29

“I will display my glory among the nations, and all the nations shall see my judgment that I have executed and my hand that I have laid on them. The house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day forward. And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity, because they dealt treacherously with me. So I hid my face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they all fell by the sword. I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their transgressions and hid my face from them.

Therefore thus says the Lord God: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I will be jealous for my holy name. They shall bear their shame, and all the treachery they have practiced against me, when they live securely in their land with no one to make them afraid, when I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them from their enemies’ lands and through them have displayed my holiness in the sight of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the Lord their God because I sent them into exile among the nations and then gathered them into their own land. I will leave none of them behind, and I will never again hide my face from them, when I pour out my spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God.”

Today's Reflection is by Jenna McAuley

The book of Ezekiel is probably my favorite of all the books in the Old Testament. It starts out like a fever dream. I think it might be the only place in the Bible where anyone describes what it is actually like to look upon the image of God. Sure there is talk about burning bushes and clouds around cherubim in earlier books, but in this one we've got 4 angels each with 2 sets of wings and 4 faces. There are wheels in wheels made of eyes surrounded by fire and smoke and the thunder of beating wings. I can only imagine the surprise of opening my eyes to this sight, only to have it call out to me with instructions on what I need to do.

I also love this book because its all about coming back home to the love of God. Sometimes when I read these older biblical passages, I can get caught up in the parts about losing the way and the distance from God with all this talk of treachery, and forget how God always leaves the door open to being welcomed back.

So the people of God once again fell off the path of righteousness. They do this a lot. Like, a lot. And this time God punishes them with the sack of Jerusalem and exile into the land of Babylon. He's mad. He's not done with his children yet, but he's pretty mad at them and is going to let some natural consequences play out. My kid had a sleepover the other day and when I was upstairs on the phone, they filled a bunch of squirt guns with guacamole and water and started a water fight in the living room. I can relate to wanting some natural consequences for some treachery. So God goes and finds Ezekiel and shows him this wild scene and tells him to go and find the people of Israel and encourage them to make amends and come back to the fold. Some will, some won't, but he offers a chance to decide.

Now let's assume that my reaction to a guacamole river in the living room is slightly less spectacular than what God gave Ezekiel, although maybe I should ask Etta about that one. When the awe of the message of the treachery wore off, so too came the invitation to make amends—you better clean up this mess right now or else. And so my child bore the shame of their treachery and mopped up the mess, with a fair amount of help from mom, and got welcomed back to the fold.

Passages like this one are good reminders that we get welcomed back into the fold no matter how regularly or spectacularly we mess up. God's chosen people get infinite numbers of chances. As a parent I know this love well. Etta asks me about it sometimes—if they do something bad enough will it make me stop loving them as their Mom? Not a chance. Don't do it please, but I won't ever stop loving you. And if you forget, I'll send a reminder. Possibly in the form of a messenger with a wild story about wheels.



Jenna McAuley started attending Holy Apostles in the height of the pandemic when God called her to walk down a street she had never wandered before and she happened upon our beautiful little church. She lives in Ditmas Park and is blessed to be raising an almost 10 year-old child named Etta. In her spare time Jenna fights cyber-crime and visits art museums.