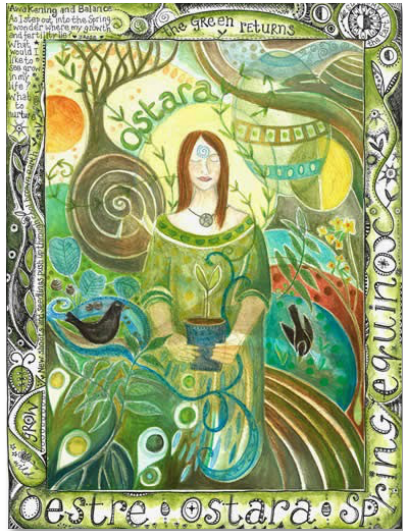


## **“Some Nourishing Words”**

Rev. David Gregory

March 20, 2022

Lent 3



### **Readings**

Isaiah 55:1-3

from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson

Hey there! All who are thirsty,

come to the water!

Are you penniless?

Come anyway—buy and eat!

Come, buy your drinks, buy wine and milk.

Buy without money—everything's free!

Why do you spend your money on junk food,

your hard-earned cash on cotton candy?

Listen to me, listen well: Eat only the best,

fill yourself with only the finest.

Pay attention, come close now,

listen carefully to my life-giving, life-nourishing words.

I'm making a lasting covenant commitment with you,

the same that I made with David long ago: sure, solid, enduring love.

“What If?”  
a poem by Chelan Harkin  
in her book *Susceptible to Light*

What would the world be like  
if instead of tabloids in waiting rooms  
we had watercolors,  
if doctors’ offices  
served strawberry juice for free, with lime,  
if elevator music were out of the box  
and lifted you up like yodeling marimba  
like Cat Sevens reggae  
like sound without walls?

What if beige meant,  
“please put graffiti on me?”  
and what if graffiti meant art  
and God meant color  
and church meant an open canvas and  
Sundays, free to explore it?

What if each day of the week  
were named after one of the ways  
we feel under light?

What if evolution displayed  
its culminating senior thesis project  
in your fingertips and God’s best truth  
manifested in the perfect geometry of your eyes?

What if your eyes were my own  
and when I looked in them I’d see the hope  
that’s been waiting for us to hold it together?

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Today in these moments we have reached the point in Lent or Lengthening that we call the Equinox, a place on the calendar that is equal parts of light and darkness. From here on out until we’ve passed the solstice, the light just becomes greater and greater. There’s something innate within us, something we share with the trees and flowers and the grasses, a sense that it is time to wake up, to open ourselves to new energies, to learn and grow. It’s like the dawning of a new day, when we awaken and yawn and stretch and see our day as a blank canvas waiting for us to create.

It is a beautiful moment of co-creation, an every-morning kind of Easter where the promise of new life is what sustains us in times of pain, sadness, darkness, and grief. We must acknowledge our losses, the ones that over the last week or so have touched our community so deeply. In these moments we rejoice with those who rejoice, and we weep with those who weep. These are moments of interdependence when this wordless experience of sadness washes over us, reminding us that church is really not an institution, but an organism that lives and breathes together. When one member suffers, we all suffer together. When one finds joy, we laugh together. When one is hopeless, together we find a new sense of hope as our desires and our beliefs meet together in the same place.

This strange and difficult world we live in, the one with the daily images of invasion, terror, and destruction, brings us this same sense of oneness as we consider the plight of the Ukrainians. It breaks our hearts and plagues our psyches. We struggle to find hope for a negotiated peace, and beyond that prospect, it is hard to tell where any of this will stop. So we'll take our rays of sunshine wherever we can get them. And today in the glow of equinox, we find the promise of more light, more hope, more wisdom, and greater peace—peace within our souls, peace of mind, peace in the world, peace between nations, peace that surpasses human understanding. This is what we need right now, and it comes to us in a flow of grace that we cannot adequately explain. We can only open ourselves to receive it, and relinquish the need to explain it at all.

On this third Sunday in Lent, we find ourselves with some nourishing words from the prophecy of Isaiah—ancient wisdom from within the Judeo-Christian tradition; words that give life when we can sift and sort our way through them. If we're honest, the language of the Old Testament can often feel as grim as the evening news. Descriptions of ancient wars told in violent imagery suggest a God who is angry, one who brings judgment on the nation of Israel in the form of outside invaders whenever they disobey. These are ancient people trying to make sense of all that transcended them, to take the tragedies of their lives and fit them into some cohesive narrative. The one they came up with was that God was mad at them. They reached for an explanation they could comprehend. They had done wrong, and if they cleaned up their act, everything would be good again.

How do you explain a ruthless despot who exerts brute force against others? From the very beginnings of human history there have been these wounded souls who find ways to seize power and to wield it against others. And Jesus, among many others, showed up speaking truth to that power, bringing hope to his own Jewish people, and also to us, with a message of hope and redemption. It certainly didn't do away with the energy of empire, but it showed that empire to the world for what it was. It got Jesus crucified, but they could not crucify what was true.

Bad things such as crucifixion do happen, and when they do, we're left with a need to make sense of them, but some of them just don't make sense at all, and they don't have to. We just need to go searching for our next resurrections, and stand in awe of them wherever and whenever we find them. They're in a stream of sunlight, the burgeoning earth ready to explode into springtime, the beauty of a watercolor on a wall that warms our experience, or a moving piece of poetry that can transport us to a new place, or a colorful piece of graffiti bringing life to a blank and blighted cityscape. These resurrections do not take us away from the world that is; they take us through it. They do not promise a life without grief, but rather a path to the other side of it. There's no point in trying to paper over our losses, for they will always bleed through.

There was a time about twenty-five years ago when I thought that sadness would swallow me whole. Those around me seemed uncomfortable with my grief, and I could hear the words spoken to me in childhood: "Don't be sad." Thankfully, there was a beautiful wise soul who gave me permission to feel what I felt, and in the feeling of it I may not have changed anything, except to pass through to the other side of it.

The prophecy of Isaiah, while announcing its share of doom, grief, and sorrow, also proclaims hope and blessing and peace, and it comes in the form of nourishing and loving words. It helps us to experience the world in a way that is honest and truthful. It isn't all good or all evil. It just is. Our poet for today, Chelan Harkin, asks the question, "What if?" What if the world that exists could become the world we desire it to be? Perhaps there would still be despots, but their power might be diminished in the presence of love. Perhaps there would still be losses, but we would love each other through them. Maybe there would be a pandemic, a war, some political upheaval, or an ecological disaster. But that's not all there is or would be. On this third Sunday in the season of Lengthening, let's see if together we can love each other to the other side of our losses. With divine help, let's see if we can create something more, something better. Perhaps through us, the heavenly realm might become near.

Peace to the world. Peace to the Ukrainians. Peace to all of us. Peace to you.

