

Again ... joy
Isaiah 53:10-12
April 5, 2015

How does it all begin?

With a dance ...

Out of nothing, out of an empty, shapeless, lifeless void, God sets the universe dancing. Atoms of hydrogen and helium excite and collide and combust, dancing into flame, dancing into light, swirling, congealing, taking shape as stars, dancing stars!

Alongside the riotous and frenzied dance of the stars, a slower dance begins. Other elements born from the dance of the stars -- nitrogen and oxygen and carbon and ammonia -- swirl too and congeal and take shape as planets, dancing planets!

On this particular planet, the one we know most intimately, the dance moves in a new direction. Oceans heave and roll and crash against the forming landscape, mountains and hills spring up from the plains, and streams dance down the slopes. Grasses and grains sway to the rhythms of the wind, while redwoods and white pines stretch their arms toward the sun. White tip sharks and bottlenose dolphins cavort in the seas, ospreys and barn swallows soar and frolic in the skies, and wolves and goats dance on the shoulders of the mountains.

It is an exuberant dance, all choreographed by God and the dance brings God great joy. God saw it and saw that it was good!

And then -- and then -- God makes us and invites us to join the dance. God makes us to be like him, to share his joy in the dance of creation, and to find joy too in our own creating.

It begins with a dance, a wild and fantastic and jubilant dance. And how does it end? It doesn't. Not because it can't, not because the universe itself is endless (because it isn't), not because we are immortal (because we aren't), but because God wills the dance to go on! God wills the dance and the joy it brings to him and to all who will share it with him to go on.

We are born to bring God delight by our dancing and to have ourselves the joy that comes from God's delight. We are born in joy and we will again have joy.

After a life of suffering, he will again have joy.

After a life of suffering. There is suffering. Not because that's just the way life is. Not because nature and matter and flesh and blood are constitutionally weak and fatally flawed. Not because we are some kind of special spiritual creatures who don't really belong here. Not because we are just unlucky, doomed to suffer.

No, we suffer by choice, on purpose, with purpose, by God's choice, by the will of the Lord. The Lord says, "It was my will that he should suffer." Suffering is the way the Lord chooses for his servant: for his servant Jesus, and for his servant Israel, and for us, if we count ourselves as God's people, servants of the Lord.

Suffering is part of the dance, an essential part of the dance that is born out of joy and leads into joy. It is out of suffering, out of struggle, that beauty is made: the struggle of the dancer against gravity, the struggle of the painter against convention, the struggle of the musician against mere noise, the struggle of the disciple against aimlessness, the struggle of each and every human being against sin.

If we choose to dance with Jesus, we will suffer, too, as he did, because gravity and convention and noise and aimlessness and sin conspire to pull us down, to flatten all that is beautiful in us, to make us conform, to make us fall in line, to make us do and be and want what everybody else is doing and being and wanting.

God's dance is humility, but pride and pretension despise humility.

God's dance is generosity, but greed and frugality think generosity is silly and ill-advised.

God's dance is peace, but power and pragmatism consider peace-making to be weak and misguided and dangerous and naive.

God's dance is love, without boundaries or limitations, but the lovers and would-be dancers of this world have no use for love of enemies, and no use for love of people they can't be bothered with, and no use for dancers who do show love without boundaries or limitations.

When we dance with Jesus, we will be despised and rejected, like him. We will endure suffering and pain, like him. But, like him ...

*After a life of suffering, [we] will again have joy;
[we] will know that [we] did not suffer in vain.*

Jesus did not suffer in vain. We are what we are because of his suffering. Because of him, we and all of creation are invited to the dance of life, a dance that even in the midst of our own suffering, is a joyful dance. Jesus is alive -- here, today. Here, today, Jesus is filled with joy and Jesus is dancing ...

Would you care to dance?