

Pastor's Reflections

by Jeffrey E. Frantz

*Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands at a distance;
for truth stumbles in the public square, and uprightness cannot enter.*
(Isaiah 59:14)

*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will
rise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your
light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. (Isaiah 60:1-3)*

America, behold your future! I want to make a bold prediction: our nation is on the precipice of *finding our way back*—back from an ill-advised intrusion into Iraq and back from our current abyss of economic unraveling and chaos.

Let's tell the truth about ourselves. We've gotten horribly off track in recent years. Our two major sins in all of this: hubris (i.e., pride) and greed, two of the classic sins of the ages.

I.

It was hubris that recklessly catapulted us into Iraq. The arrogance and short-sightedness of this decision, which far too many of our national leaders supported, has cost our nation immeasurable loss of prestige and respect in the international community, at an exorbitant cost of \$10 billion a month and counting.

In the above scripture from *Isaiah 59*, the prophet, Third Isaiah, has a word for the Israelites at the current state of things. This is during the period known as *the Restoration* after Israel had returned from Babylonian exile. These were difficult and challenging times. It's hard to *come home again*.

In chastising the people, Isaiah points out how *truth has stumbled in the public square*. People were doing their own thing and pursuing their own ends, with scant regard for God's purposes. Truth has stumbled, too, in the public square in America. To date, there has still been no national reckoning of the lies and deceptions that led up to the war.

My guess is that if we Americans thought we could somehow *win* the war through some *surge tactic* or whatever, that we'd probably be okay with that. Out of sight, out of mind; *win the war and bring the troops home*. All done, sealed and delivered.

But *whoa!* Whatever happened to the immorality of the war to begin with? *Truth* has stumbled seriously in our public square from the moment we launched the invasion. And we think God hasn't noticed??

Before we leave the Iraq war and talk about *greed*, let's put another truth on the table. The war, however we understand it, is *not* winnable. We're not trying to conquer Iraq; and the only way you *win* an occupation is by leaving.

The problem is that nation-building is not something that nations do for one another. Nations can only build themselves, with support coming from outside. Sadly, even tragically, it was hubris (pride) that got us into Iraq and it's hubris, again, that is keeping us there. We think it's all about winning and losing when what we really need is a national gesture of repentance and a new birth toward a new beginning.

II.

The sin of greed, as has been universally noted, is at the root of our current financial crisis. Did you know that of the twenty wealthiest nations, the income gap between CEO's and entry level employees is greatest in the United States of America?

At some point in our culture, the profit motive and the lure of *the good life* somehow got translated as *entitlement*. The recent success of *The Prosperity Gospel*, championed by Joel Osteen and others, has tapped into this prevailing mentality to where Christian conservatives decry any form of taxation (which is really a form of proportionate sharing of resources—all notably biblical) and, worse still, seem increasingly desensitized to the needs of *the little ones*—the most vulnerable members of community—a cornerstone of the gospel of Jesus.

III.

However, America, listen up because **a new day is on the way**. Third Isaiah touches on such day in the reading from Isaiah 60 noted above.

Arise and shine, says the prophet, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you.

There's a new energy in the air, a new spirit coming across our nation. You can feel it. People of all shades and stripes are coming together. No matter the election results, there's a new spirit on the move across our country.

To those regressive voices that want to silence the movement of this spirit, the peoples say, *hush!* Around the world, the international community awaits the dawning of this new day in America. Listen to Isaiah on this: *Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

What these verses from Third Isaiah suggest to us here in America is: *the day is come, the hour is near*. **America, behold your future**. A new trajectory of global leadership is on the horizon. A new vision for world peace is bursting to be born.

What we have learned in the Iraq war and are learning in the throes of the financial crisis is that *this is not the future we want*. The future we want is a future that, simultaneously, lifts up the best of our Constitution and the best of our sacred writings.

As we Americans **behold our future**, humility is our starting point; humility that reminds us—again and again—that we're all in this life together. And that because we're a part of the global community, what is best for us is, ultimately, what's best for the international community.

What we learn in this is that when we merge our sacred writings with our Constitution, the derivative is a world where love and justice win the day. So, let us *arise and shine*, America.

For your light has come, says the prophet; and *Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn*.

O what a day!