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Heavens Torn & Transformed

by Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Inspired by Isaiah 64:1-9
33"x24" Oil pastel on cambric fabric, stretched on wood panel with gold leaf; framed with white oak

As soon as I read the opening line of this passage from Isaiah, a bolt of desperation surged through my body and I repeated the prophet's prayer in my own words: "Please, God, tear open the heavens and come down. End the wars. Protect those in fear. Stop the suffering. Save us!" The Hebrew word translated as "tear" *(qara`)*[2] is almost always used to describe the ancient grief practice of rending one's garments. In that sense, the prophet is pleading for God to lament with us.

I began this piece with that concept in mind. I stretched a night sky of black fabric on a wood panel, and with oil pastels I dappled the horizon with light, as if the dawn were ablaze with fire. When I finished, I admired my creation, a tribute to a world filled with couple-color and pied beauty.[3]

Then it came time to rend God's garment. I delayed and grieved this step, yet I felt the prophet's plea urging me onward. I ripped the fabric, tearing the heavens and mountains open. In the space between, I added gold leaf—a glimmer of God's presence in the gaping wound of the world. To finalize the artwork, my husband created a frame using white oak—a nod to the "oaks of righteousness," the brokenhearted who mourn yet who receive God's comfort and blessing in Isaiah 61:1-3.

As I worked on this piece, I contemplated what grief does to the body. In my experience—having lost my mom to cancer when I was a child—grief begs to be metabolized. I must find ways to acknowledge, release, and transform it; otherwise, it steeps in my body like a poison. Therefore, I came to realize that Isaiah is not calling for God to destroy the earth, but to dramatically transform it. Though we may "fade like a leaf,"[4] the prophet makes a hopeful turn: leaves decompose into the clay of the earth, which then gets reshaped in the potter's hands.

In a war-torn world filled with dappled beauty, we cry out for God to come down and radically transform us into a new creation. May it be so. **—LISLE GWYNN GARRITY**

Look: *Study the colors and textures within the sunrise. What do you feel? Now study the torn edges of the fabric. What do you feel? Where do you notice God's presence most—in the sunrise, in the tearing, or somewhere in between?*

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2 biblehub.com/hebrew/7167.htm
3 See the poem, "Pied Beauty" by Gerard Manley Hopkins. poetryfoundation.org/poems/44399/pied-beauty
4 In the weeks I was working on this piece, I collected several decaying leaves, admiring the intricate lacework of their exposed veins, which is not so unlike the veins visible in my own skin. I experimented with adding the leaves to my artwork, but I was unsuccessful in finding a way that revealed their aesthetic appeal. However, I marveled at how something so beautiful was fading into dirt.

Reflective Service – Shenkel UCC

8:30 a.m. Sunday, November 29

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE
When the nights are long
and the roads are hard,
we turn our eyes to the stars.
When the work is demanding
and injustice unending,
we stand together, arm in arm.
When fear looms large
and grief weighs heavy,
we cry out to God without holding back.
And when the dawn of tomorrow feels far away,
we gather together to light the candle of hope.
(*Light candle.)*
Like the stars above,
may this light shine bright.
May it guide our path.
May it inspire deeper hope.
Until God's promised day,
may it be so. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF CONFESSION
Holy God,
we have been known—
to bite our tongues,
to work through a broken heart,
to don our favorite rose-colored glasses.
We have been known—
to look for the bright side,
to sweep the pain under the rug,
to choose ignorance for the benefit of bliss.
We have been known to keep the hurt in our heart to ourselves.
Forgive us for filtering our honesty.
Forgive us for ignoring the power of lament.
Forgive us for not turning to you first.
Remind us that you are a God who listens
and you are a God who restores.
With open hearts, we pray. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

SCRIPTURE READING Isaiah 64:1-9

VISIO DIVINA *Artwork: Heavens Torn and Transformed by Lisle Gwynne Garrity*
Look: Study the colors and textures within the sunrise. What do you feel? Now study the torn edges of the fabric. What do you feel? Where do you notice God's presence most—in the sunrise, in the tearing, or somewhere in between?

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE
THE LORD'S PRAYER

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION