

Look to the rock (Isaiah 51:1-6)

## Isaiah invites us to remember our origins.

by [Luke A. Powery](#)

August 25, 2017

*To receive these posts by e-mail each Monday, [sign up](#).*

*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

“Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.”

Look to the earth, to nature. Look to the larger environment. This imagery in Isaiah suggests how the life of faith is interconnected with all of God’s creation—rocks, quarries, humans, deserts, gardens, coastlands, the heavens and the earth. The reader’s attention is turned first to the rock; only then we are told to look to Abraham and Sarah as well. The material creation is primary as the source of our birth, the thing from which we were hewn and dug.

This passage cries out for environmental respect and care, for a sustainability theology. Even if the writer doesn’t mean that we literally come from rocks and quarries, the metaphor reminds us how our genesis in the book of Genesis, when God created, was *good*. “God saw that it was good” when God created the world and everything in it.

In talking about where people come from, Isaiah invites them to remember their beginnings, their roots, looking back to move forward. It is a biblical *sankofa*, an African word from the Akan tribe in Ghana that is translated literally as, “it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind.” Isaiah reminds the people what God has done in the past in order to affirm that God will provide again in the future (“The LORD will comfort Zion”).

And the future includes the past, as there is another Eden: God “will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD.” The echoes of nature and creation, even “heavens and the earth,” hearken back to the beginning to help us see the ending.

Sight is important—“look.” Hearing is significant—“listen.” The created order is included, even our bodies (see the reading from Romans 12). It takes a holistic, sensory approach—the whole heavens and the earth—to understand and serve God. Minds aren’t sufficient to capture the fullness of God. We need our bodies and all of creation to show us God, to help us hear God.

“Going green” is not just about environmental sustainability. It is about God’s proclivity for loving the entire good world from the beginning until the ending.