

THIRSTING

Isaiah 55: 1-9; Mar. 20, 2022; Union Cong. United Church of Christ
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What better place to have our passage for today come from than Isaiah's beautiful Book of Comfort, addressed to the Jewish people in exile in Babylon almost six hundred years before Jesus was born. We certainly could use a little comfort for our world today, couldn't we?

Through beautiful poetry, Isaiah the poet and prophet, describes the heart of the biblical message: God loves us, no matter what. God reaches out to us in the worst of times and makes promises to us that are not just pie in the sky, not just theoretical, but real attainable possible promises. God promises us the things we hope and yearn for from deep in our hearts, the very basic needs of life: coming home and being welcomed when we are lost; wonderful banquets of delicious food when we are hungry; clean, flowing, cool water to satisfy our thirst when we are parched; and a community that affirms and supports and loves us when we long for meaning in our lives.

And Isaiah asserts – here's the most beautiful thing - there is no price of admission. Everyone is invited to the party – even people you would not expect. And through and through the promises made to us by God, runs a deep and tender, compassionate, unconditional love for the human predicament – the way we humans continually make a practice of getting ourselves entangled and trapped in ways and habits that get us so off track we become lost or cut off from the very source of what we need most.

How thirsty are you? Isaiah calls out – 'Ho – everyone who thirsts, come to the waters' – fresh, clean, clear water is available here – no need to pay – just come, come to the waters.

Isaiah recognizes that we are thirsty, whether we realize it or not. And that we need our thirst quenched whether we think we are thirsty or not. During the years when Gigi and I operated a Community Supported Agriculture farm, each year, farm interns worked with us learning and working with us on our fifteen-acre vegetable and livestock farm. And each summer, we would emphasize the importance to each farm intern of keeping a bottle of water close by them and regularly drinking. Don't wait 'til you feel thirsty', we would say, 'take a drink before you feel thirsty – or you are likely to become dehydrated and sick.'

Isaiah the poet talks about water and thirsting for water using pretty imagery, but really, he is talking about a much bigger thirsting – it includes thirsting for water – but even more important, thirsting for meaning – thirsting for community – thirsting for restoration – thirsting for reconnection – thirsting for grace and compassion and unconditional love. Thirsting for whatever it is that God wants to give to us – freely and without counting the cost.

We live in a world where everything is for sale. If you can imagine something it is likely you can buy it somewhere, or something very similar, or at the very least, you can buy the components to make it. We also live in a world of constant promotion – we are barraged with advertising – offers of all the things we surely must 'need.' Special offers and enticements can fill every imaginable want or desire. Even if we don't need it or even want it, we are convinced that we should want it, that we do need it, that we deserve it, that we must have it. A new car, a new computer, a swimming pool, a bigger house, a vacation home, a boat, more pets, more horses, all kinds of foods, clothing, play equipment, fishing equipment, motorcycles, toys and more toys

All these enticements promise to satisfy but turn out to be wasted calories without any nutrition. Oh sure, the hunt is exciting, the purchasing fun, but the having is often so empty. All these empty promises only take us farther from God and any way of life that takes us away from God, leads to our starvation, dehydration, and death.

Lent provides us a time and a season to consider the reality of what we value and how we live. We might not immediately be aware of how far we have wandered from the ways of God – yet we must have a sense that at least some of the very things we were sure would give meaning and fulfillment to our lives simply leave us feeling empty or pleasing us far less than we hoped.

Isaiah's words can help us refocus to hear the truth so we can redirect ourselves to the way of God as the very best direction for our lives.

All humans no matter who we are, share this deep need for something greater than ourselves, whether we name the source God or by another name. It is also true that at any given time, not all of us share the pangs of true physical hunger and thirst. Perhaps this is one of the reasons we are encouraged to fast during Lent, to remind us of what it feels like to have one's stomach's growling or one's mouth parched. It is a spiritual discipline, not only during Lent, but in every season – to be reminded of those who do hunger and thirst for physical food and clean water. And when we remember – we also can strengthen our solidarity and unity as one connected people as we seek and find ways to respond to those needs.

How might we share the plenty we experience with those who do not have enough? How might we support systems that make sure that all communities everywhere have access to clean water? How might we support systems that will make sure everyone has enough food and that that food is nutritionally healthy.

How might we support our church community as we reach out our hands to offer that glass of clean, cold, uncontaminated water to anyone thirsting?

Those are hard questions and it's difficult to know exactly what the correct answer should be/could be. Hard yes, and at the same time, we know that we are never alone as we struggle to find the best response for us. God will be with us. God will love us no matter what – whether we get the answer perfect on the first try or whether we fail at first or over and over. God will be with us when we try again, and try again, and again, to be God's hands doing God's work.