

The Good Life

Third Sunday in Lent

Isaiah 55:1-9

¹ Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

³ Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁴ See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.

⁵ See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near;

⁷ let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

I know we have all been dreaming of what we would do if we won that mega millions jack pot! It was reported to be a half billion (with a “b”) dollar prize. Did anyone win last night? If not it continues to grow – and if someone won it, I am sorry if it was not you! We dream of how money, houses, land, jewels, the “right” society, our children getting into the “right” college, our children meeting and marrying that “right person” will make them and us happy. In our society everyone wants the “good life” and we all have ideas of the events, circumstances, resources that will get us that good life!

In the modern world, even on Sunday, even in Lent, people – we - crave satisfaction. Perched alertly and anxiously on their pews, in our case – on our chairs - the devout seek

a word from the Lord. We seek God's face. Afterwards we will rush out to Sunday brunches or loll around regrouping, re-creating, and re-composing ourselves after the helter-skelter hustle of the weekday. All week we have worked and struggled, compromised and sought approval, earning our sustenance and paychecks from a world of competition. All week we have done what was necessary to buy what we need and to produce what is demanded of us. We try to please those over us so we may obtain what we need, what we believe will give us satisfaction, "the good life." Yet on Sunday we find ourselves spent, drained, and still thirsting for more.

In his essay "The Religion of the Market," David Loy maintains that the traditional religions of the world need not fear that new sects, cults, or sciences will displace them. The new danger, he insists, is the religion of the market. This new religion is a juggernaut, a never-ending mass media, a Madison Avenue-driven machine that insists that we demand and are provided more and more, with no thought to the notion "Enough!"

Perhaps Isaiah received this word from God after visiting a market. Even without mass media, the ancient market square was busy with commerce, with people rushing to buy, struggling to sell, and some, with no assets at all, standing at the margins, perhaps begging for a handout so that they too might taste their daily bread.

Like Isaiah we are all finite creatures beset with daily needs. Never are we free from want. Even in the Lord's Prayer we ask, "Give us this day our daily bread." God could have created us without these needs, without these drives, but God did not. God wants us to depend on him.

Yet the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, and God is near to us with everything we need. Isaiah reminds us, however, that what we really need is not things, but God. Why, therefore, do we rush about seeking something that can never fully satisfy? God calls us into ever deeper fellowship. God has the best wine and milk, the best bread and richest fare available. Yet we rush past God, seeking to buy what God has

already provided us freely. Only in fellowship with God are we truly fulfilled—yet this is not the understanding of the present age.

Ours is an age of reason, science, lottery tickets and markets. These influences are important in their place, but God's wisdom is not found in materialism. God's ways are not our ways, nor are the Holy Spirit's thoughts our thoughts. This is why we must seek the Holy Spirit while she is near. God is always near and willing to fellowship with us. We, however, are like ships that could be firmly anchored, but who wish to set forth on our own adventures. At some point we may find ourselves so far from God we cannot feel or hear God.

God says, "Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live." We are truly alive only in covenant with the God in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). God calls us into covenant to be fulfilled and completely satisfied by God. We are called to be the people of God. Our happiness is assured only when we abide in God. Money is insufficient. So are houses, land and jewels insufficient. God's sustenance and blessing are freely given. As the people of God our mission is not so much one of toil and struggle, but one of joy.

Paradise lost is thereby regained. We are to attract others to God simply by permitting ourselves to be divinely blessed. We are to be endowed with an everlasting splendor—the glory and approval of God—freely given to us. This is our witness to a hurting world. Thus we need not rush about seeking our satisfaction, our “good life” from drinking from fountains that are bound to run dry. We need not buy and eat bread that is bound to mold and decay. **Darryl M. Trimiew**

At the end of the movie *Millions*, there is an image of Isaiah's promise of abundant love and mercy. Throughout the movie, in which a little boy finds millions of dollars of stolen money, his family has been trying to use it to get something good for themselves, to enjoy their newfound riches. However their frantic efforts have been tearing them apart. Only the boy Damian has been searching for how he might use the money to help

someone else, so that he might find peace and healing following his mother's death. Near the end, when the family realizes the futility of what they have been trying to do, they give the money to build water wells in an impoverished African nation. That endeavor unleashes a great celebration of joy and abundance in which everyone who thirsts, including the family, comes to the waters. It is a reflection of Isaiah's vision, in which the ways of God bring forth life for all. **Daniel M. Debevoise**

Our constant striving to satisfy ourselves is doomed to failure. Indeed these are the fruitless efforts, the wicked ways that Isaiah calls us to abandon. Too often, like spoiled children, we become obsessed with our toys and forget their Giver. We must be in the world and participate in its problems. We must work and pay taxes, yet this is not all there is to our lives. In particular, when we reject God's call and strive to serve mammon, we settle for scraps when we could be feasting.

Yet this is not our first or only option. David in this passage is characterized as a commander of a nation. While we need not view ourselves as a martial force, we are still in some respects blessed soldiers in the army of God—soldiers who need not abandon our posts to receive our blessings. This passage predates 1 Peter 2:9. There we are called to be "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." So too in Isaiah, we are constantly called to come back to God. No matter what we have done, we can and will be forgiven.

Here we find a divine paradox: although our thoughts are not God's thoughts and our ways are not God's ways, although God's righteousness is as high above our sinfulness as heaven is above the earth, God is still near! God loves us and is eager and ready to bless us. During this Lenten season, as we relinquish indulgences in order to please God, let us first focus on being with God, spending time with God, drinking the milk and wine God gives us—eating the bread of life. Let us praise God above all the earth so everyone around us will be drawn to the joy and glory of God. In so doing we will be supremely satisfied. **Darryl M. Trimiew**

So, it's okay that your lottery ticket was not the winner last night. And it is okay to purchase another one to support schools in Michigan! But remember the good life comes from our relationship with God!

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