

Communion Homily

WNMC – Matins

March 24, 2019

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Lectionary Readings: Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Cor 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9.

Verse for Reflection: “O God, my soul thirsts for you in a dry and weary land.”
(Ps. 63:1).

Hymn of Response: Hymnal # 474; I hunger and I thirst”

Our lectionary readings this morning are so appropriate for a Sunday which includes the Lord’s Supper as part of our service.

The Psalmist begins with an expression of deep longing which I have abbreviated in the verse for reflection in your order of service. The heading of the Psalm would suggest that David might be in a real desert in Judah, perhaps at the start of his journey into exile at the time of the great rebellion initiated by his son, Absalom. But the language may also be metaphorical, talking about a spiritual desert. “O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (Ps. 63:1).

In Isaiah, the focus shifts from longing to invitation. “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” (Isaiah 55:1). And then comes a question: “Why do you spend your money on that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” (vs.2).

There is a contrast being made here, between wine and milk and bread that is a product of labor, of earning a living, and that you buy with hard-earned cash. And then there is a reference to food and drink that comes without cost and without labor – its free.

But there is more to this contrast. The wine and bread that we work for and buy, does not fully satisfy, we are told. And then Isaiah pleads with us, “Listen, **listen** to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare” (Isaiah 55:2).

But what exactly is this rich food which we are to delight in, and which satisfies, and which comes without cost or labour? To answer this question we have to understand the context in which these verses are found. They are located in the later part of the book of Isaiah or in a second Isaiah as some scholars prefer. Isaiah is here beginning to paint a picture of a new heaven and a new earth where justice and perfection and peace reign (Isaiah 65:17-18; 56:1). It is a vision of an ideal. That is why Isaiah reminds us that the

LORD's ways and ideals are higher than our ways; the LORD's thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9). And Isaiah goes on to reassure us that the LORD will accomplish that which he purposed (vss. 10-11). In other words, this vision will eventually be realized.

But then Isaiah brings us back down to present day reality, where things are not ideal, where justice and peace do not reign. He identifies some, perhaps many, who are "wicked" and "unrighteous" (vs. 7). He is very direct, and very personal. It is all too easy to get preoccupied with systemic evil around us, and forget that ultimately, systemic evil is rooted in individual persons, sinful persons, even wicked persons whose thoughts do not align with God's higher thoughts or higher ways.

So, forsake your evil ways, Isaiah says, "return to the LORD," call on his mercy, because the LORD specializes in extending pardon. And then keep focussing on the ideal, doing your small part in exemplifying the ideal, and working towards a new heaven and a new earth which God will ultimately create at the end of history. This is the wine and bread which is the richest of fare and which satisfies.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthian church, uses language that is similar to Isaiah, as he urges the members to learn from Israel's history. I couldn't help but notice a contrast between "all" and "most" in our reading. While **all** of the Israelites were rescued from Egypt under Moses leadership, while **all** of them were protected by the cloud, while **all** of them passed through the Red Sea, while "**all** ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink," nevertheless, God was not pleased with **most** of them (1 Cor 10:1-5).

Why? Because they were idolaters, eating and drinking and indulging in revelry (1 Cor 10: 7). Because they were eating bread and drinking wine that did not fully satisfy.

But here, as in Isaiah, there is also mention of God's redeeming grace, both past and present. God redeemed Israel from Egypt. They feasted on spiritual food and drink in the wilderness. And though they sinned, God provided a spiritual rock that foreshadows the redemption that is available in Jesus Christ. For us too, when we are tempted, God always provides "a way out" (1 Cor 10:13). "God is faithful" (vs. 13).

In our reading from the gospel of Luke, Jesus reminds us that **all** people are guilty because of sin (Lk 13:1-5). "And unless you repent, you too will **all** perish" (vs. 3). But here again, there is a message of grace as Jesus gives us a parable of the fig tree which for three years has not yielded any fruit (vss. 6-8). The owner is ready to chop it down. But the gardener asks for one more year of grace, and that is granted by the owner. That is what our God is like.

Shortly, we will be invited to the table of our Lord. We come to the table as very needy people. We come from deserts, both physical and spiritual. We come with souls that are thirsty and longing for God and for higher ways and higher ideals.

We can respond to this invitation with the assurance that we come to a table that offers us the richest of fare. We will be eating bread and drinking the fruit of the vine that satisfies as nothing else can, and it is free. We will be eating the same spiritual food and the same spiritual drink that has nourished the people of God through the ages.

Praise be to God.

Amen.