

Come to the Waters

Isaiah 55:1-9

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I like invitations, don't you? Last week I was invited to a Glastonbury girl's basketball tournament game. I liked being there in the midst of all that school spirit. The week before that, I was invited by a church family for a taco supper. I liked being in the spirit of that home. And the week before that I was invited to a veteran's art foundation meeting. I like being in that spirit of healing. Invitations sort of make my day!

The invitation recorded in Isaiah 55, known to some as the Great Invitation, is to experience an unusual kind of abundance, an abundance of grace! Come! All you who are thirsty, come to the waters. Come! All you who are hungry and have no money, come and eat!

Isaiah lived in a community where individuals and families had grown very thirsty, indeed. Worn down by invading armies, they thirsted for peace. Worn down by crop failures, they thirsted for full granaries as in the days of old. Worn down by a loss of hope, they were thirsty for evidence that a new day was dawning. Isaiah's people were like the residents of Galveston, Texas following the hurricane of 2008: wondering if anybody cared, wondering if God had abandoned them, wondering if their lives would ever feel normal again.

Into this attitude of darkness, Isaiah steps up onto the soapbox and announces an invitation that has come from God. Bring your thirst to me. Bring your hunger to me. Bring your despair to me.

In the Gospels, we hear this same refrain from Jesus. I am the Living Water; bring your thirst to me. I am the Bread of Heaven; bring your hunger to me. I am the Resurrection; bring your despair to me. These are invitations to experience the abundance of grace.

In the last three days of her life, my mother became unresponsive for the most part, but not entirely. There were many people who noticed the signs that she was thirsty. And I watched as various ones ministered unto her various thirsts. It was a beautiful thing to behold. It was a grace. She was literally thirsty for a cool drink, and a Hospice aide dipped a sponge into water and placed it on her lips so her parched tongue could feel some relief. As each of her friends would stop by for a final visit, she would pucker her lips as if to let them know she was thirsty for a kiss. And they kissed her, some upon the lips, some upon the cheek. A care-giver knew to play a certain blues tune on the boom box, and she would move her shoulders ever so slightly, as if thirsty for one more dance. When her eyes would no longer open and her fingers no longer squeeze, her ears could still hear. So, a son and a granddaughter played that Heart and Soul duet on the piano. You know the one I mean. Even the thirst to hear a familiar melody found satisfaction. I consider all those who noticed the thirst and brought the water in its many spiritual forms, to be angels. I wasn't going to mention my mother in my sermon this week, but she kept pushing her way into my consciousness. It was as if the Prophet's invitation, "Come to the waters," had been honored there in the front room of her home.

On Communion Sundays, my thoughts turn to the grace of God. I see that the bread and the cup on the Communion table embody this same Great Invitation to bring our true thirsts to God, to surrender our spiritual hungers to the Christ. On Communion Sundays, I am glad for the Invitation to come to the waters, to receive what can not be purchased, to consume what can not be earned, to believe what can only be imagined.

When the Apostle Paul urged the church members to greet one another with a holy kiss, he was inviting them to notice each other's thirst, to be the water for the neighbor, to be that long cool drink for the one who is tired, the one unemployed, the one living with an addiction, the one afraid to be him or her self. "Greet one another with a holy kiss," he said. Be a vessel of grace.

When the Galveston Twenty One landed and got out their tool belts and went to work on that Baptist church and in those homes, they were being vessels of grace, water for a thirsty village. When the South Church youth raised \$6000 at the homeless sleep out to ease the pain of those who bed down under bridges, they were being vessels of grace, water for a thirsty village. And when you notice who is eating alone in the cafeteria and put your tray on the same table and start up a friendly conversation, you are being a vessel of grace, water for a thirsty soul.

I like invitations. Don't you? Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters! In the greatest of hope, I say, Amen!