

Sermon – “Come to the Waters”

Sunday, March 17, 2019

Scripture Readings –Isaiah 55:1-9, Psalm 63:1-8

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Our first scripture reading is Isaiah 55:1-9, the concluding chapter of what theologians have identified as Second Isaiah beginning in chapter 40. A central theme within these chapters of Isaiah is that of a new Exodus—the return of the exiled people Israel from Babylon to Jerusalem. There are few parts of the Old Testament that equal Second Isaiah in expressions of sheer delight and absolute joy. The author imagines a ritualistic return led by Yahweh. The steadfast love for David points to the reaffirmation of the Davidic family as the special vehicle through which God’s grace will be bestowed on Israel and, as Isaiah 55 makes clear, on all humankind. All who thirst and hunger after God shall be filled. Hear now the good news of the steadfast love of God who calls us all to the waters.

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 David 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 God has glorified you.

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

⁷ let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts;

let them return to the LORD, that God may have mercy on them, and to our God, for God 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. Amen

Our second scripture reading, Psalm 63, echoes this morning’s anthem based on Psalm 42, which describes one’s longing for God as thirsting in a dry and weary land. Psalm 63 has elements of lament, thanksgiving, trust, and praise blended together. At its core is the understanding that life relies on God’s steadfast and loving presence. May our hearts and minds be open to the hearing and understanding of God’s Holy Word.

1 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. 2 So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. 3 Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. 4 So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. 5 My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips 6 when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; 7 for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy. 8 My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. Amen.

The title of the sermon – “Come to the Waters”

The text: O God, you are my God, I seek you, my life thirsts for you. Psalm 63:1

Let us pray: Loving God, we thank you that when we are dry and we seek you, you fill our cup and quench our thirst with your steadfast and loving presence. During this season of Lent as we journey with Christ to the cross, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, our Rock and our Water. Amen.

And Jesus said,

Come to the waters, stand by my side.

I know you are thirsty-- you won't be denied.

I felt every teardrop when in darkness you cried.

And I strove to remind you that for those tears I died. (For Those Tears I Died, Marsha Stevens)

These words are written upon my heart and have sustained me through dry and weary places along my faith journey, places of darkness, disappointment and dismay. I learned the song “For Those Tears I Died” at youth group during high school. This week when I asked my sister Becky if she remembered the song, spontaneously she began singing the words with me, Yesterday when Peter and I picked up my mother from the St. Louis airport, I began to sing the words to her in the car thinking she would be touched by the lovely sentiment. Instead, she reminded me that I really cannot sing.

In my mind's eye I have many images of Jesus by the water—Jesus calling to the disciples on their fishing boats...Jesus feeding the five thousand who gathered to hear the word of God in their hunger and thirst for righteousness, Jesus calming the sea and the disciples in the middle of a storm, and Jesus meeting the disciples at the shore in the early morning following his death and resurrection while he prepared a meal and reassured them in their sorrow and loss.

Through the years as Peter and I raised our son Paul, we took an annual trip each summer to Lake Michigan for renewal and refreshment. We came to the water to break bread with family and friends, to walk the shoreline, to share in healthy competition around bocce ball, and to build sandcastles. It was on these shores in 2006 that we celebrated our nephew's engagement with Paul Kieffer, at the age of 11, singing Bobby Darrin's “Somewhere Beyond the Sea” to the star-gazed couple.

And it was on Lake Michigan in 2010 that we learned of the untimely and heartbreaking death of Peter's 52-year-old brother Bill. Together we sat on the shores and together we wept, finding comfort in one another's arms, in the sound of the waves splashing on the beach, and in the Savior who reminds us that for those tears he died.

Water is a rich metaphor for the refreshing and life-giving presence of God in our lives. When the psalmist talks about thirsting for the living God, it is understood that life itself depends on God. The body cannot live without water and the human spirit cannot survive without God.

Seventy percent of our bodies are made up of water. God created us with an internal mechanism that helps gauge how much water one needs to consume. It's called “thirst!” Three quarters of the surface of the earth is also made up of water. Scientists warn that Climate Change has serious consequences for our planet. If we do not curb our appetite for burning fossil fuels, waters will rise, warm days will become hotter, chilly days will become colder, and

storms will become more violent. So both then and now, we have a timeless and universal understanding of the biblical metaphor of water.

Amos insisted that justice should “roll down like water” and righteousness like “an ever-flowing stream.” The gentle waters of Shiloah—an aqueduct, which carried water from a spring to a pool inside the Jerusalem walls—were to Isaiah a symbol of quiet and confident faith in God.

The divine Shepherd leads the flock “beside the still waters,” and the one who meditates upon the law is like a “tree planted by streams of water,” fruitful in each season and ever-green in the summer heat.

Jeremiah criticized the people for relying on water stored up in leaky cisterns and rejecting Yahweh, the “fountain of living waters.” Jesus, at Jacob’s Well, promises the woman of Samaria water that would become a “spring welling up to eternal life.”

Each one of us experiences the thirst, the longing to be whole and at peace with ourselves, one another and God. Too often we try to fill the emptiness, the dryness of our spirit in all sorts of ways, many of which are unhealthy and unfulfilling. In a world filled with competition for our affections, allegiance, energy and time, Isaiah 55 and Psalm 63 invite us to cultivate our relationship with God, to be strengthened in our faith, and to find wholeness in God’s steadfast love offered to all who thirst and come to the waters.

Hafiz, a 14th century Persian mystic, encourages us not to quench that thirst or abandon that longing too quickly in the poem entitled “Absolutely Clear.”

Don’t surrender your loneliness
so quickly
let it cut more deep.

Let it ferment and season you
as few human
or even divine ingredients can.

Something missing in my heart
tonight
has made my eyes so soft,
my voice
so tender,

My need for God
absolutely
clear.

The psalmist’s need for God led him into the sanctuary. It is in a place of worship, in the presence of God’s steadfast love, that the ancient Hebrew finds sustenance and refreshment in the shadow of God’s wings, clinging to God’s right hand.

Today on our journey with Christ to the cross, we have come to the waters in this place of worship. Following our recent adult education forum on the faith of Islam and this week’s

Children of Abraham fellowship among Muslims, Jews, and Christians, our shared need for God is absolutely clear.

Today, the God who joined us in our humanity to redeem the suffering of the world shares our tears as we mourn the tragic and unthinkable deaths of our Muslim brothers and sisters who were gunned down in their place of worship within a city called Christchurch. We stand by the waters in solidarity with those who lost these precious sons and daughters and who, like you and I, thirst for God in the midst of the evil of this world, the evil for which Christ gave his life.

May we never stop thirsting for God and may we never forget, what Isaiah affirms, that all are invited to come to the waters.

And Jesus said,

Come to the waters, stand by my side.

I know you are thirsty-- you won't be denied.

I felt every teardrop when in darkness you cried.

And I strove to remind you that for those tears I died.

So be it. Amen.