Sermon – "Want and Plenty"
Sunday, March 23, 2025
Scripture Readings – Isaiah 55:1-9, Luke 13:1-9
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Our first scripture reading, Isaiah 55:1-9, is the final chapter of what theologians have identified as Second Isaiah beginning in chapter 40. There are few parts of the Old Testament that equal Second Isaiah in expressions of sheer delight and absolute joy. The joy of Isaiah 55 is the prophet's realization that God's mercy is close at hand, and that it is freely available to any who will draw on it. David's witness reaches beyond Israel to include all nations. All who thirst and hunger after God shall be filled. Hear now the good news of the steadfast God who calls us 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. 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. 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. See, I made David a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the people. 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. Seek the Lord while God may be found, call upon God while God is near; 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. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. 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, describes one's longing for God as thirsting in a dry and weary land. The psalmist's life is threatened, but he or she finds sustenance, satisfaction, and security in the experience of God's presence. Psalm 63 blends the elements of lament, thanksgiving, trust, and praise. May our hearts and minds be open to the hearing and understanding of God's Holy Word.

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. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. 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; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. Amen.

The title of the sermon – "Want and Plenty"

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 to you, our Rock and our Water. Amen.

A few years before Peter and I found a home on the waters of Lake Springfield, I had a pillow embroidered with the words, *Quod Cupio Mecum Est,* which in Latin means "What I want, I already have." I was drawn to this quote not only because it reflects a deep and abiding satisfaction with one's life, but also because it resonates with the Apostle Paul's sentiment in Philippians 4: *I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to be in want, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any or all circumstances, whether having plenty and being in want, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

Indeed, it is Christ's strength which sustains us in want and in plenty. Drawing on Christ's strength is essential these days as we find ourselves thirsting for a good word amid the desolate political environment. As Contemporary American Author, Poet, and Editor, Lauren Wolk, articulates so well. *People don't want much until they have plenty, then they want more and more.* As our country moves in the direction of taking from those who want and giving it to those with plenty, we long for the expression of joy and absolute delight we find in Isaiah 55 as the prophet announces God's mercy, which is freely available to any who will draw on it. *Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters!* Jesus also invites us to the waters in the song "For Those Tears I Died" written by Marsha Stevens.

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.

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 at youth group during high school.

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 overcast 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. Amos insisted that justice "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 a quiet and confident faith in God. The divine Shepherd leads the flock "beside the still waters," and Jesus, at Jacob's Well, promises the woman of Samaria water that would become a "spring welling up to eternal life."

When the psalmist talks about thirsting for the living God, it is understood that life itself depends on God. The human spirit cannot survive without God as the body cannot live without water. Seventy percent of our bodies are made up of water. God created us with an internal mechanism that helps gage how much water one needs to consume. It's called "thirst!"

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 affection, 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 deeply.
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 her 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. 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. We stand by the waters in this sanctuary and in solidarity with those in want and plenty around the world, who like you and I, thirst for God.

As the deer longs for water, we thirst for the loving, steadfast, and merciful God who is our heart's desire, our strength, and our shield. Amen.