

## Sermon Text – Sunday, March 20, 2022 – Pastor Paula Kraus

**Epistle Reading: I Corinthians 10:1-13, Gospel Reading: Luke 13:1-9,  
OT Scripture for Message: Isaiah 55: 1-13**

### Dependable

This scripture, in the NRSV bible, opens as “HO! everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money come, buy and eat!” HO – is a rather startling way for God to call God’s people. It wakes the listener up and gives the impression that what follows is important. HO – listen up folks I have something important to tell you, and indeed what follows is important. These words are God’s invitation to abundance. An invitation for the people in exile to have their need for nourishment fulfilled at no cost. Why should they spend money and labor on what does not satisfy when God supplies the richest fare of finest quality without cost? This is an invitation to those who have no resources or access to resources – God leaves no one out of this invitation.

Why would that have sounded good to the ears of the original audience? Remember the Babylonian army forced these people into captivity. The armies removed them from their land – the land God promised to Abram and the land that Moses led them to after their wilderness wandering. The people, who long associated God’s presence with their being in the land, may have felt abandoned and no longer in God’s presence. Even though other prophets assured the people that God “would one day bring the people back home, in a new act of deliverance and salvation”<sup>1</sup> maybe there was some doubt and questions. Or maybe there was fear of change.

This part of Isaiah is associated with the end of Babylonian control, mid-sixth century BCE. Those who were living in exile were now experiencing more freedom under the Persian Empire and there was hope of returning to their homeland. These words follow a vision of restoration and renewal recorded in chapter 54, a vision of future glory and vindication. And now, the words we just read are a call from God to come home – God will provide. Notice the words used to give confidence and hope to the people. Listen to me and delight in the richest of fare (v 2). Listen that you may live (v 3). The Holy One of Israel has endowed you with splendor (v 5). The Lord will have mercy and freely pardon (v 7).

The people may have been comfortable during the exile, they had homes and families in the region exile had placed them in – maybe they were hesitant to give up those ‘things’ to return to Judea where all their troubles began. Persian rule had made their lives a little easier – how could they manage? In this scripture we hear Isaiah telling the people that God would be with them, God would renew the covenant promised to David. I wonder if this message reminded the people they could depend on God and that everlasting covenant. This is an invitation to people coming out of exile and an invitation to a feast that money can’t and won’t buy.

Why would God’s dependability matter to the people at that time? I wonder, if because of all they had been through during the years of exile, they might have come to a crisis of faith. Did God in fact abandon them? Were the Babylonian gods stronger than their own God – Yahweh? It did matter to them that God was a God of promises, and that God was a God they could depend on to lead them back to their homes. It did matter to them that Yahweh, their God, was the one true God who supplies abundance without cost. It would not be an easy

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<sup>1</sup> from Feasting on the Word adult curriculum for the third Sunday in Lent year C – 2019  
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journey for those who wanted to return to Jerusalem, they would need to rely on God for deliverance in safety. It mattered to them that they could depend on God.

This reading finishes with a promise that God's will would carry out God's purpose. This may be a reminder to the people that the exile produced the desired results and now they would be "led forth in peace" to return to their homelands and to renewal and restoration.

But what do these words mean to us, other than a fun praise song to sing at worship? Why would it matter to us that God is dependable? How do these words of restoration and renewal ring in our ears and fill our hearts in the middle of the Lenten season when fasting, mourning, and sacrifice seem to be the usual themes?

From the readings of scripture that began our service this morning the message is similar. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians Paul reminds them that God is faithful and consistent. Paul writes, "No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful and will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with testing will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor 10:13). This does not mean that God puts challenges in our path to test us. And, this isn't a promise that we can handle everything that comes across our paths by ourselves, but a promise that God will provide strength to endure challenges this world puts in our paths. In the scripture from Luke 13, Jesus tells a parable that gives us a sense of God as nurturing us thereby enabling us to be fruitful witnesses. To me this gives a sign that God is dependably caring for and nurturing the faithful.

This scripture from Isaiah is an invitation to us, all of us today as much as it was to the exiles in the sixth century BCE. Of course, as in often the case, we must accept that invitation to be the servanthood and witnesses God intends. This scripture gives us a reminder of God's unending and never-failing love and forgiveness as it paints a picture of return, restoration, and repentance. All perfectly positioned for us to consider during this season of Lent and during this time of change and discernment for the congregation of Sayre Christian Church. As God called the captives out of exile in the time of Isaiah, we too are called from exile on our journey through the wilderness of Lent.

"There are people who need to hear of God's love, people who need to be reminded of God's acceptance of them just as they are, people who need to know God welcomes and calls them home no matter how far they have wandered<sup>2</sup>." How do people hear this message from God today, how do they receive acceptance and welcome? Yes, it is written in scripture – we can read these promises of God and hear them read right here in worship. Is that how God reaches the thirsty who have no money, no resources? Then again, isn't that what the church is to do? Isn't that the purpose of elders and deacons within the church – isn't this the function of the body of Christ? Jesus gathered and taught the disciples and his followers so his work of kingdom building on earth could continue.

God's promises are dependable, however we are not always going to be certain how things will work out, the believing and trusting must come first. God called the people back from the exile, but they needed to have faith. I have read in a commentary, "It is at God's urgent invitation that we are to leave our comfortable worldly ways and launch out in paths of

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<sup>2</sup> Davis, David A. "Third Sunday in Lent: Isaiah 55:1-9 Commentary 2: Connecting the Reading with the World." *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year C, Vol 2. Lent through Pentecost*. Green, Joel B., Long, Thomas G., Powery, Luke A., & Rigby, Cynthia L. eds. Westminster John Knox. 2018. 63-65. Print.

service and living that do not depend on our strength but on [God's]<sup>3</sup>.” This is stepping out in faith for the church.

The latter part of this scripture from Isaiah reminds us that just as the rain and snow nourish the ground and create conditions for seed to flourish, God's word fulfills God's will. This is a reminder that God is dependable and will enable the faithful to work for the fulfillment of God's will. When things in the lives of the community of faithful seem to be spiraling out of control, the body of Christ is present for strength and support. That, at least in my mind, is how God's promises of ever-lasting love, strength, mercy, and pardon are visible in our world today.

Through the role of elder and deacon in the church there is leadership, and the loving hands and heart of Christ can reach people in need. Through the role of elder and deacon in the church God is present to the community gathered at worship. There are many ways this plays out, not only at the Table of Remembrance each Sunday morning, but as we listen to each other with care and concern. God's presence is felt as the elder and deacon offers care and prayers for those who are lonely, ill, or unable to get to church on Sunday mornings.

This is the message then for the church today. Sometimes, when we make changes or try to move forward in mission and ministry to do something different, we don't know what the outcome will be. We don't always know what is at the end of the path we are led to, but we have a promise from God that we will delight in the richest of fare. God has promised good things, but it requires faith to accept God's invitation of abundance. It requires faith for this church to create a vision for the future that involves strengthening the roles of elder and deacon. It requires faith, surrender, and trust for individuals to discern how they can use their talents to function in such roles.

Our faith and acceptance of God's invitation can strengthen this church to say yes to more opportunities to serve God, knowing that God will supply what we need to care for others. God will enable the people of this church as we accept the invitation to abundance, as we trust and surrender to that invitation. Saying yes is something we have been reluctant to do. It's a trust thing when we say yes without knowing what that yes will bring into our lives. But if we don't say yes to God's invitation, then we are missing something wonderful in our relationship with God. We are not only missing the finest of fare God offers, the bread of abundant life, but we are missing the opportunity to see God work in the lives of others. We are missing a part of the body of Christ when we are reluctant to say yes to those opportunities to serve.

That is the challenge of living in our world today – how does the work Jesus started continue when the body of Christ is too busy to say yes to our neighbors, and to each other. There are so many in our world today who are thirsty and wandering in the wilderness. There are so many who cannot feel God's presence. There are so many who need just to feel a little bit of love and compassion that the body of Christ can offer. Issues in life affect each of us, everyone struggles, everyone needs to feel the loving presence of an “everlasting covenant” and faithful love. The arms we lean on during these times of ‘exile’ are the arms of the body of Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> Oswalt, John N. *Isaiah The NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text . . . to Contemporary Life*. Zondervan. 2003. p. 604