

Sermon Preached by Pastor Jennifer Rose

February 28, 2016

Isaiah 55:1-9

“Treasures for All”

Dear friends in Christ: Grace be unto you and Peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Is anyone feeling a little hungry today?

Being hungry is never pleasant. In fact, hunger can inspire bizarre behavior in us as humans. When we're hungry, we sometimes do foolish things, sometimes we get irritable, or worse, feel sorry for ourselves.

I finally figured out why fashion models always look so intimidating when they're walking down the runways...they're hungry! They only weigh like 28 lbs, so they can't be eating! So they march around looking so mean because they're so hungry! Someday it would be fun to sneak in and throw a slice of pizza on the runway! Man, that would be pandemonium! Like sharks at a feeding frenzy!

Hunger isn't pleasant. We don't look forward to when we can be hungry. We don't reminisce about the wonderful times of being hungry we've had. Hunger is not something we normally desire. Yet we hear some very interesting words about being hungry and thirsty today. Listen to our text for today as interpreted in Eugene Peterson's book, *The Message*:

"Hey there! All who are thirsty,
come to the water!
Are you penniless?
Come anyway--buy and eat!
Come, buy your drinks, buy wine and milk.
Buy without money--everything's free!
Why do you spend your money on junk food,
your hard-earned cash on cotton candy?
Listen to me, listen well: Eat only the best,
fill yourself with only the finest.
Pay attention, come close now,
listen carefully to my life-giving, life-nourishing words.
I'm making a lasting covenant commitment with you,
the same that I made with David: sure, solid, enduring love.

God knows that we're hungry, that's what he's speaking to there! We spend our time and resources of our lives trying to satisfy that hunger, but on stuff that isn't real food.

This message is addressed to those who have been torn from their homeland. Their houses bulldozed. Their Temple has been destroyed. Their city has been left in ruin. Their nobility dragged into slavery, in exile. And the message is pretty simple: Although people may treat you like garbage, God loves you.

Does this message translate to today? Do you ever feel like people treat you like garbage?

Listen to these national statistics of our students in school: One out of every four students (22%) report being bullied during the school year. 64 percent of children who were bullied did not report it; only 36 percent reported the bullying. Students who experience bullying are at increased risk for poor school adjustment, sleep difficulties, anxiety, and depression. The reasons for being bullied reported most often by students were looks (55%), body shape (37%), and race (16%).

And adults, lest you think that those years are long gone, Adult bullying is becoming increasingly more common. Have you ever felt like someone treated you like garbage? Have you been in a place where you have been ashamed? Have you felt guilty? Have you been afraid? Sad?

Then this message from Isaiah is for you. Whatever you may think of yourself, whatever others may think of you, God loves you. God treasures you. You are beloved. You are loved with an everlasting love. That won't ever go away.

But, dear friends, the gospel message of that love in this passage also means treating people like it is true as well. People need a community where they can be somebody. Do you think that First Lutheran Church can be that community, where all of you can feel loved, treasured, valued, where you can come to know, deep down inside you, that you are loved by God and by this community and you are treasured?

A few nights ago, I was watching one of my favorite movies, Field of Dreams. In case you've never seen the movie, it's about an Iowa corn farmer who hears a voice, plows up part of his crop to put in a baseball field that allows players from the 1919 White Sox team to come out of what is left of the corn and play on it, then travels to Boston to pick up Terence Mann (played by James Earl Jones), then to Minnesota, then back home.

Eventually the movie gets to this point where Shoeless Joe Jackson was leaving to go back to wherever it was the cornfield led the players. He stopped, turned, and said, "Hey, you want to come with us?" Ray Kinsella (the farmer played by Kevin Costner) asks, "You mean it?" Shoeless Joe says, "No, not you. Him", and points to Terence Mann.

At this point Ray gets upset, asking, "Wait a second. Wait a second. Why him? I built this field, you wouldn't even be here if it weren't for me. I want to know what's out there. I want to see it." Shoeless Joe just looks at him and says, "But you're not invited." Which gets Ray even more upset. "Not invited? What do you mean, I'm not invited?" He can't believe he's not invited!

Have any of you ever been "NOT INVITED" to an event? Was there ever a time in grade school where a classmate had a birthday party and you were "NOT INVITED"? Or maybe in High School when someone you thought was your friend has a party and you're "NOT INVITED"?

It's probably happened to you. If you're not part of the "in crowd", you are left on the outside looking in. If you were on the outside, how did that make you feel? I can tell you from experience that it's not a good feeling.

Invitations are often very restrictive. Wedding invitations are given to relatives and close friends; celebration dinner invitations are often restricted to top people in business or politics.

But the invitation Isaiah offers in chapter 55 is a universal, non-restrictive invitation. God, through Isaiah, issues an open invitation to "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!" Anyone can eat and drink this meal, free of charge.

God issues open invitations. Unlike those grade school birthday parties, unlike those high school "in-crowd" parties, unlike those restrictive wedding or celebration dinner invitations, and unlike Shoeless Joe's invitation to only Terence Mann, these invitations in the Bible are for EVERYONE. No one is excluded. Like the giver of the great banquet, this invitation is for you... even if you're poor, blind, if you struggle with depression, even if you struggle with addiction. God invites you if you're black, white, green, Catholic, Presbyterian, or Baptist. Remember and believe, that when God invites us and says, "Ya'll come", He means EVERYBODY!

The Great Invitation is for everyone who has been searching for meaning and fulfillment but have never found it.

The Great Invitation is for anyone who has desired so much more out of life...
...so much more than the world has to offer.

The Great Invitation is for those who feel empty, lost, and without hope.

The Great Invitation is for those who continue to hunger and thirst for ultimate satisfaction.

The Great Invitation is for anyone who has ever cried out: "What is the point of my life? Is there more to life than carpools, meetings, paying bills, and growing old?"

God's Invitation is to experience an abundant life—the kind of life that only God can provide. And this Invitation is extended to every one of us today.

It's one of the main lessons of Lent. God loves ME – even a sinner like me. Can there be any doubt in your mind that he loves you, too? He offers you cool water this morning. Take it – and drink.

God's grace flows like a cold, clear mountain stream. It refreshes you. It cleanses you. Just step into the water. Let it wash over you.

It's been a long, hot day – and you're tired. But that dry, parched place that you thought nobody would ever touch – he touches it. Your deepest wound – the hurt that's so bad you never talk about it with anyone – God is already there. Open yourself to the relationship. He will heal you.

That place inside that's so raw you don't dare to let anybody see it – the place you barely admit to yourself is there – God stands ready to reach out and heal you. Go to him in prayer and seek healing this morning.

Do you love God? Well, you need to understand: he loves you even more. Before the beginning of time, he knew you. Before he created the world, he knew your name. Across the ages, he calls out to you.

Come. Drink of the water.

Thanks be to God. Amen.