

**March 24, 2019**

**THEME: Surrender**

**TEXT: [Isaiah 55:1-9](#)**

**TITLE: Faith + Trust**

*By the Rev. Heather Schoenewolf*

When have you ever been thirsty? *Really* thirsty?

It's hard to imagine in our country with coolers of ice water, water fountains in every public location and safe tap water. I had to think back decades to remember a moment of genuine thirst for myself:

It was the summer I was 13 years old, and my sisters, cousin and I decided—in our brilliance—that we should go to play tennis on outdoor courts in the early afternoon in July, in Tucson Arizona. Within 15 minutes we were parched—thirstier than we had ever been—and hurried home to cool water. We were thirsty and didn't even know it.

Isaiah's invitation to cool water and rich food that are there for the taking was initially extended to the Israelites in the midst of great trial. A book written over time and by many authors, Isaiah prophesies to the Israelites from exile in Babylon to their return to Jerusalem six centuries before Jesus was born. The temple in Jerusalem has been destroyed, the Davidic dynasty was overthrown, and God's people had been scattered and separated. They are a people with no social or spiritual home, trying to cling to identity and to any vestiges of community they can find in the midst of both internal and literal displacement.

Today's reading, is a turning point in the story, offering comfort, reassurance, and hope to a people long in despair. Isaiah reminds the people that their current context will not remain constant. The down-and-out nature of life as they know it is not the end of the story. Rather, the story will continue, by God's grace, and God's people just need to hold on. In fact, Isaiah reminds them, God is preparing a lavish banquet that is theirs free of charge. God will quench their thirst—for water and for home, for justice and for community. God will not only sustain them but will position them to flourish, preparing a feast for them of the finest foods.

See, God will remain faithful to God's covenant, even when circumstances have changed, even when power has shifted, even when the world is a mess and it appears that all hope is lost. This passage reminds us that God is GOD: loving, powerful, just, merciful. God can be trusted to be God: faithful, redemptive, life-giving.

This is a message that we desperately need today.

We can think of those who experience exile in our current context: refugees seeking safe haven; children separated from their parents at the border and

detained. Yet we know too that a sense of displacement and alienation can occur even in the places we call home. In our modern context, exile can look like estrangement from family who don't accept you for who you love; exile can look like abuse within a relationship that was once your safest space; exile can look like the loss of security experienced by furloughed workers during a government shutdown. And exile can be dispensed by a broken justice system that favors those with power—whether it be the power of position, the power of wealth, or simply the power of privilege that comes with the color of one's skin.

We too live in the context of a broken social order.

In our own city, we are wrestling with this brokenness, in the wake of the verdict of the officer who killed unarmed teenager, Antwon Rose.

*Even if* we did not have a national legacy of indoctrinated racial inequity, something is wrong.

*Even if* the officer was doing what he had been trained to do, something is wrong.

*Even if* the letter of the law pointed jurors to acquittal, something is wrong.

When the white men who perpetrate mass shootings at church in Charleston, South Carolina, a high school in Parkland Florida and a Synagogue in Pittsburgh are arrested, detained, and able to stand trial, and an unarmed African American high school junior is killed for running from a car, something is wrong. We need to do better. We have to do better.

But how?

And then we hear the words of the prophet Isaiah. These words are offered to us, just as they were offered to the Israelites millennia ago. His words may sound hollow, or impossible on this side of heaven. Nothing is free in this life, we know. Everything comes at a cost—even that which we most need. There is injustice and bias. There are people we love who let us down. We probably *really do need* to cover our laptop's camera with painter's tape to prevent hackers from watching our every move.

But there's more to the story.

Isaiah offers these words of assurance to a people displaced and disheartened – and offers them to us as well.

When the world's wears its brokenness on its sleeve, and when the people we love fall short, Isaiah invites us to trust in the one who is truly trustworthy, and to

place our hope in God. He gives us an opportunity to recognize God as co-author of our story, and the one whose redemptive love will have the final word.

One commentator says:

(These) nine short verses that might be describe as the heart of the biblical message: God loves us, no matter what, and reaches out to us even (or especially) in the worst of times, making promises that are not just pie-in-the-sky, not just theoretical.

God promises the things that we most yearn for, deep down in our hearts, the very basics of life: homecoming when we're lost or far away, a rich feast when we're hungry, flowing fresh water to satisfy our thirst, and a community of hope when we long for meaning in our lives...<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah invites us to feel the soothing balm of God's promises, and to trust that God will step into the suffering and chaos of our time and give us some relief. Isaiah invites us to recognize and even claim the possibility that God will set things right.

Now, I admit, I don't know what this will look like in real life. I personally do not expect to receive an Evite to a great banquet after church. But I do have a sense that when we feel dried up, when we feel lost and alone and we don't know what to do, that God will strengthen us, guide us, and even replenish us.

I remember being wounded by the words and inaction of someone important to me. Who it was or what they did are not the point of the story. But the wound was so deep that I wasn't sure if or how I could stay in relationship with this person anymore, but the relationship I had with this person was so deep that I wasn't sure that I wanted to cut them off either. I didn't know what to do. So I talked it over with Sr. Anne, my spiritual director. How could I live in this place limbo? Was it my responsibility to try to teach the person about how what they had said had hurt me, even if talking it through might hurt me again, or even if the person might not understand how their words and inaction had stung me? Was it my responsibility to forgive—and if so, did I need to just act like nothing had happened? And did forgiving mean forgetting?

Sr. Anne invited me to participate in a guided meditation. So I sat up in my chair and place my hands on my lap and closed my eyes.

Soon I was walking along the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was walking toward me. He greeted me with love, and he knew the burden I was carrying without me even having to name it. I did not have to explain it, or justify myself. Jesus just knew. Then, in this time of meditation, I was invited to entrust the person who had hurt

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<sup>1</sup> Matthews, Kathryn M.; Sermon Seeds

me to his care. I was invited to literally hand this person over into Jesus' arms—along with my hurt, my confusion, my worry, and my own inability to think of a way forward. Jesus could work on this person in ways that I never could. He could teach and heal and infuse this person with love. And Jesus could heal me and teach me and love me too.

And so I placed this person into Jesus' arms, trusting that God's love in Christ was enough for me, and enough for this person—that God's love in Christ that conquered even death could overcome this small personal exile.

It sounds simple, but it changed my life. There was now a way forward that carried with it possibility for healing and gave me cause to hope.

I was reminded that in spite of the brokenness of my heart or the brokenness of the world, God is faithful still. God breaks into our world and into our stories—personal and communal—and offers sustenance, support, possibility, mercy and new life. God makes a way out of no way, setting a feast in the midst of our longing, and even in the midst of our foes.

As one commentator says:

Even in the strangeness of a faraway land and in the face of the power of our foes, God promises a restoration and renewal beyond our previous condition. While we may not be able to see the possibility or understand the way, God's word will accomplish its purpose.<sup>2</sup>

For what do you thirst? Reconciliation? Acceptance? Love? Healing? Peace?

May it be so—for with God all things are possible.

Thanks be to God.

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<sup>2</sup> Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year C, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide