

PSALM 63:1-8

¹O 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.
²So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.
³Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.
⁴So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

⁵My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
⁶when I think of you on my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
⁷for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.
⁸My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.

ISAIAH 55:1-9

¹Ho, 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.
²Why 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.
³Incline 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.
⁴See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.
⁵See, 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 he has glorified you.

⁶Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
⁷let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

SERMON

I was reading this week about hiking in the Grand Canyon, I've never been there before, and it's something I'd really love to do, maybe when the boys are a bit older and can join us for a good, long hike. Anyway, I read a really interesting fact about hiking in the Grand Canyon in my research this week. Apparently along the trail they've put up signs that say, "Stop! Drink Water! You are thirsty, whether or not you realize it." In the Southwest US, as is the same with other hot, dry climates or hiking at higher altitudes, your body is sweating and letting off water as you hike and work, but it's so dry your sweat instantly evaporates off of your skin. It's totally different from a humid Michigan summer where you can see the moisture leaving your body, because the sweat is visible on your skin. In dry climates you're losing a ton of moisture, but it's hard to know that it's happening when you don't see it. So, the national park has taken it upon themselves to remind you to drink water while you're hiking in the hot, dry Grand Canyon. Stop! Drink Water! You are thirsty, whether or not your realize it. It's weird to think that you wouldn't

notice your own thirst, but if you stop and think about it, we do this every, single day.

Isn't this the case with so many of our physical needs? We get so wrapped up in what we're doing, we forget that we're hungry or need to use the restroom or take a drink of water. Maybe this is just me and the fact that caring for three young children often means my own physical needs come last, but I often find that when I stop moving for just a second, I realize I've been hungry for three hours and just haven't stopped to grab a handful of nuts or whatever. Occasionally it would be great to have signs up around my house that say: Stop! Drink water! You're thirsty, whether or not you realize it.

The prophet Isaiah, he's saying two things to God's people here, first he's saying the same thing as that sign: You're thirsty, and you don't even know it, so stop. Stop what you're doing, come and drink. You're hungry, so come to the table, enjoy a festive meal, wine and milk and rich foods. Come and eat, you're hungry and you don't even know it. You're spending your money for that which isn't bread, you're laboring for things that don't satisfy you. You're wasting your time and money and energy...so just stop. You're thirsty and hungry. Spiritually, you're dehydrated and starving, and God is offering you something good, you just don't see it. So, stop. Take a break. Drink some water.

Now, second, the Prophet Isaiah is also inviting the people of God into the work of God's kingdom. He's telling them not to just fulfill their own needs at God's table, but then to extend this work one step further: everyone, let's just stop for a moment. Stop, take a drink of

water. You're thirsty. Eat some of this food God has provided. Let's take care of our most basic needs. And as we eat, let's hear these words and be invited into something more, "my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." God certainly cares about our physical, earthly needs, I mean there's a reason Isaiah is using this image of eating and drinking, it's foundational to our human survival, it's a part of our everyday. But then he switches gears and immediately reminds the people, as they sit there eating, our ways are not God's ways, and we're invited to tend to the hunger and thirst of others.

It almost has the same pattern as those emergency instructions on an airplane. In the case of cabin depressurization what do you do? You put the air mask on yourself first, and then you reach out and help the person next to you. Make sure you can breathe, and then help someone else get air. Slack your thirst at God's table, and then look outward to find another thirsty person, and invite them to sit down and drink up.

At the point Isaiah is saying this to the people, they're in exile under the Babylonians. They've sort of lost hope that they're ever going to return to their land in Israel. The people of God are really struggling with two different things. First of all, they've really started to integrate with the Babylonians, they're losing a lot of what makes them distinctive as a community, they're slowly losing touch with the God of Israel, the one who brought them out of Egypt and promises to deliver them from Babylon. The second thing they're struggling with is justice within their community. We know this

from the passages surrounding today's text. The people of God aren't being the community they should be. Some people are going hungry, others are left without shelter, and still others are feasting all the time, have food to spare, and yet they still seek more. The imbalance and injustice of resource distribution is becoming a problem.

And their situation, it begs the question: what are God's ways? As we sit and enjoy this milk and wine without cost, the rich foods of God's table, the many ways God cares for our needs, how then should we live as God's people? What is God asking of our own community?

And the people of Israel did exactly what we try to do today: they made it so complicated. God's ways must involve ritual sacrifices. It's all about believing the right dogma, following the right practices, singing the correct songs, using the proper name for God. Getting all of your religious ducks in a row. I mean, sounds kind of familiar, right? Who gets to serve Communion? Which hymns shall we sing? From the small questions of worship, what kind of bread we use and all that, up to the major questions: who do we believe Jesus really is? Quite often we find ourselves thinking that God's ways, God's thoughts must be connected to right religion. We read a passage of scripture that talks about drinking wine and milk, and then instead of thinking of the fridge, we start to ponder if the color of the communion chalice matches the liturgical season. That's obviously hyperbolic, but you get the point.

But what if the answer is so much simpler than that? What if Isaiah is using these images of eating and drinking somewhat literally? What if God's thoughts are primarily concerned with people being fed? What if God's way is to make sure our sisters and brothers in Flint have safe, clean water to drink? What if God is less worried about our orthodox worship and theology and more focused on making sure people don't sleep on the streets of Ann Arbor in the cold? What if this is quite literally a passage about being fed and then feeding other people?

Worship done well, that is important. Coming to sing our songs and tell our stories, this is one way our souls are fed and tended to. It's a conversation worth having: what hymn to sing and which brand of gluten free bread tastes the least like sawdust. That matters. It matters because worship is one way our souls are filled up, it's a figurative feast where we're satiated and then sent out into the world. It's important.

But our souls hunger for more than worship or doctrine alone. Right worship should lead us into right practice. And I think we sometimes get a little hung up on this transition. The needs of the human community are easy to see, but sometimes they're challenging to fill. People are hungry? Feed them. Children need coats? Go buy them some. The water is poisoned with lead? Well then, get them clean water to drink and then fix the pipes. Someone is lonely? Be their friend.

But we often don't stop there, right? Flint is a fantastic example of this right now. On one hand, the need is so obvious, so blatant, so clear: the children of God need clean water. Literal children are

drinking lead-tainted water that is causing major long-term damage to their growing bodies and minds. That is the textbook definition of a tragedy. And the initial response is easy: let's get them some clean water. Let's bring in bottles of water that are safe to drink. Let's support the churches and groups in Flint that are taking out and installing lead filters. Let's make sure everyone has access to safe, clean water.

But...it's not that easy, right? Flint didn't just wake up one morning to poisoned water. This is a situation that touches on outdated and failing infrastructure without money to fix it. It's about how people do or don't trust their city and state leaders to be honest with them about the situation of their own community. And did you know that in Flint people are still being charged by the utility company for water they cannot use in their houses? And, to make matters worse, if you're a house with children, and you refuse to pay your water bill, because the water is literally poison and you don't want it, Department of Child and Family Services can in fact come in and take your children away because you didn't pay your water bill and thus may not be providing for the basic needs of your children. This situation in Flint is about water, that's obvious, but it's tremendously difficult. And our response as Christians is complicated: yes, let's take water, but simply providing water alone? Is that enough? Probably not.

Isaiah is saying here, we know the needs of the human community. Everyone has them. To be loved, to be filled, to be warm and sheltered, to be fed. And what is our faith unless it leads us to these actions? A community without justice is not a community of God's kingdom. We know our thoughts are not God's thoughts,

and we're working to align ourselves with those, but it's hard. It's both simple and so complicated. And there's the rub.

So, I wonder if the initial invitation of this scripture is this week, to stop. To first, notice yourself for a moment here and there. Like Isaiah says, take your own hunger and thirst seriously. If you're thirsty, take a drink, even if you don't feel it, because you may not know your own thirst, both literally and figuratively. What are the needs your body and soul are asking you to attend to? Take a moment to come to God's table and be fed. And then look around you and take seriously the thirst of others: if you see a need, don't pause and talk yourself out of it. Don't rationalize away the real need of another. Just figure out a way to care for that person. Because our souls are thirsty, whether we know it or not. So stop. Take a drink. And then offer a glass to the person next to you.