

Isaiah 55:1-9
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“At Home in God”

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I have a theory that pet dogs are much smarter than us humans. My family doesn't have dogs right now, but over my life I have made some observations and here is my hypothesis...

Pet Dogs do not have to have a paying job and yet they get; food, shelter, exercise, love, clothing, treats, and usually the most comfortable chair in the house... Hold on... I am not done yet... they do not go to work year after year; yet, they get medical care including surgery and medicine, heat, air conditioning, a vehicle to ride around in, baths, gifts, grooming, nail clipping, play dates... and more. You wonder who has who “trained?”

Almost all of these things you and I work years to be able to have, and some of us still may not have all of them; yet, pet dogs have this given to them. Or as one person said to me, “my dog's job is to greet me at the door wagging her tail, always happy to see me.” Now, I love being a pastor but, occasionally there are days I am jealous of our pets. I really think I could bark when someone comes to the door, and, give a little love when my mom or dad comes home from work. Then I would go over and occupy your favorite chair, and listen as you say, “Aw isn't he sweet.”

Oh and Cat lovers... One might argue Cats are even smarter than dogs as these independent felines found a way to lower our expectations on how much love they will show their human family; yet, they still get all those same things dogs get without money and without price.

Isaiah 55 opens with a call to turn life into a God feast where all are welcome and everyone's needs are met, “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.”

This is a call to celebrate. When basic needs are free and widely available no one has to worry about having enough. I was recently watching “The Wedding Singer,” an old Adam Sandler movie where he has to catch a last-minute flight to Las Vegas or he is going to lose the love of his life. The only seat left on the plane is in first class where he has never been before and during the flight he is repeatedly amazed at all the “Free” conveniences he is offered as a first class passenger. Before you know it, he identifies that Billy Idol is also in first class and a few minutes later all of first class is singing and rejoicing. It looks like a party.

God has provided abundantly for our world and whether it be physical needs like food, shelter, and medical care; or personal needs like respect, integrity, and love; or spiritual needs like beauty, creativity, and connection; when we put a high price on these, we begin to create inequalities in life.

There are several places in scripture which talk about life in God as a party or feast. In each of these we find how God's all access party becomes the building ground for covenant. We hear this in the next verses of Isaiah 55, "Pay attention, come close now, listen carefully to my life-giving, life-nourishing words. I'm making a lasting covenant with you, the same that I made with David: sure, solid, enduring love. I set him up as a witness to the nations, made him a prince and leader of the nations, and now I'm doing it to you: You'll summon nations you've never heard of, and nations who've never heard of you will come running to you."

The author who has been held captive in Babylon with his people, is beginning to see the opening up of a pathway to freedom and a return home. Exile is coming to an end and the people who have been held captive in Babylon for 70 years, will have to give serious consideration to how they are going to construct society when they get home.

Isaiah here provides seeds to help guide his people to build a more faithful society when they return. First, we see radical hospitality is a part of it; a feast where all are welcome. Secondly, we hear the call to be invitational people who summon others to come to God's feast.

The church as the body of Christ is called to exemplify God's alternative, covenant community, as we create the all access feast on earth as it is in heaven. Gently, yet prophetically, we have a new opportunity to urge life in the direction of Isaiah's vision.

The church is called to demonstrate this covenant, but we can become tempted to think we are the ones throwing the party; and we forget how we need this God feast just as desperately.

People today live in our own sort of exile; this always connected, always on, overworked, overtired and underappreciated life suffering from increasingly unmet spiritual needs. To keep up we take in junk food literally and figuratively; rushing through fast food lines, reading only headlines, sacrificing civic and church service, foregoing our health, passing over prayer time, and leaving no time to tend our relationships or foster new ones.

Isaiah sends hope! Underneath and through this story runs a deep and tender compassion for our human predicament; the habit of getting entangled, trapped, in ways and habits that cut us off from the spiritual source we need most; God, and replacing God with idols like consumerism. This leads to a shortcutting of basic good manners, the acceptance of intentional deception, and it all creates a deeper sense of separation from one another. Isaiah tells us there is another way and it is God's, all access, feast on earth as it is in heaven.

In Isaiah 55 the author wants to celebrate the good news that he and his people are finally going home, but he doesn't want them to go home and pick up with life as it was before or exercise bad habits learned in Babylon. He wants them to go home with tools to reshape daily life into the picture of God's covenantal feast.

If you read a little further in Isaiah 55, the chapter closes with a whole new picture, one of the covenant community returning with a renewed focus on God, and a call to create God's all

access feast, "So you'll go out in joy, you'll be led into a whole and complete life." Yet, I imagine Isaiah's picture looks to us like a dizzying, Impressionist painting by Claude Monet.

Yet, on this Lenten pathway we proclaim again Jesus is our itinerant sage, he is the primary artist painting this picture through his miracles and healings, his parables and preaching, and through his open table approach to sharing a meal... He is bringing this all access feast to oppressed and powerless Galileans, and across time to us, describing a kingdom of love that is not just in the future but is already present in the hearts of people. Showing us -- a home! a Hope! A Resurrected Life!

Amen