

*Come and Get It!*

Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63

Whitefish UMC

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- † What do you long for? Is it comfort, security, a sense of belonging, a life that makes a difference? Human beings are created, I believe, to desire deep connection to something beyond themselves but that values their identity. Words are inadequate to describe that desire, even though Madison Avenue does its best to capture it with all the things we're supposed to need to satisfy our heart's greatest yearning.
- † When Tom and I were first dating, we loved the musical theater version of Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist. (In fact our wedding rings are inscribed with some lyrics from one of the songs.) In the movie version of "Oliver!" there is a song that evokes this longing. Oliver Twist has finally found someone who cares for him and provides for him. He awakes one bright morning with an unaccustomed sense of well-being, and sings this song:
- † (Play video of "Who Will Buy?")
- † The film goes on with an amazingly choreographed musical extravaganza that picks up Oliver's wistful song with energy and enthusiasm—it's quite wonderful. Street vendors, housemaids, chimney sweeps, businessmen, horses, passersby, birds dance and sing the glory of a perfect morning where all is right with the world.
- † Who will buy this wonderful feeling? Well, we each would, if we could! And each of us, in our own way, has attempted it. And yet the prophet

Isaiah tells us that we are looking in the wrong place when we go to market to satisfy our deepest longings.

- † Instead, in nine short verses, the prophet who is also a poet offers what might be described 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 when you die, 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—something greater than ourselves, in which and through which we might be a blessing to the whole world.
- † Oh, and here's the best part: there will be no price tag on this wonderful feast, no price of admission, and everyone—even people you would never expect—will be invited to the party. Underneath and through this message runs a deep and tender compassion for the human predicament, our habit of getting entangled, trapped, in ways and habits that cut us off from the source of what we need most, or worse, are being taken from us against our will by forces beyond our control.
- † These words of Isaiah, from what is known as the Book of Comfort, fell like rain in a desert on the ears of the exiled people of Israel. Timothy Saleska recalls his mother's voice calling him to supper as a child—"Come and get it!!!" was music to his ears—not a command but "good news."
- † He and his brother were happy to run home when they heard these words, just as the people, long ago and in exile, in "desolation and death," would have been thrilled to hear an invitation to come and enjoy free food, wine,

milk, and the restoration they longed for. It would have sounded to their hungry hearts like their mother, calling them home to supper. And the same might be said of us, today.

- † Kate Huey says, “Perhaps the voice we hear, calling us to ‘come to the waters,’ to ‘buy and eat’—but with *no money*—is the voice of an ancient street vendor selling his wares.” It reminds me of the song we just heard, the dance we just watched.
- † God is trying to tell us something: we may have settled so comfortably into a routine or a worldview that keep us so busy and distracted that we have lost touch with our deepest selves, made in the image of God. And our spirits may be thirsty, starving, and homesick, even if we can’t name those feelings on our own.
- † Daniel Debevoise describes the heat of the southwestern United States, where the humidity is so low that they have signs like those in the Grand Canyon National Park that say, “Stop! Drink water. You are thirsty, whether you realize it or not!”
- † Isaiah the poet is doing the same thing, telling us something true about ourselves at every moment of our lives. We may not be immediately aware of how we have wandered away from God—how life has lost its meaning while we have been pursuing the things that ultimately won’t satisfy us.
- † Or as the Dean of Boston University’s Marsh Chapel writes, just on target: “We become selfish. And then we notice that the cosmos fills our life with griefs as well as joys, suffering as well as rich food, persecutions as well as support, and with lives always short according to the cosmic calendar.
- † So perversely, we organize ourselves in rejection of the divine ground of our being. Instead of gratitude, we feel anger, instead of bright attention we cultivate anaesthesia, instead of joyous humility, we define ourselves by

pride. We think we deserve bounty. We sell our souls to the promise of power to control our lives.

- † We imagine the immense God to be a mere supernatural person whose good will we test, and usually find wanting. In sum, we are estranged, despite the fact our very existence is the shining forth of God's creative act.”
- † But like the hiker in the Grand Canyon who doesn't even know it, we are thirsty. The psalmist reminds us: O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you;...as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
- † You are here this morning because there is something within you that defies not only our culture but evolutionary biology as well. If, as most of the culture and evolutionary biologists believe, our deepest drives and instincts and motives have to do with survival and preservation, then our being here doesn't make much sense. But you know better, and so do an increasing number of scientists.
- † You and I are here because we long to connect to the food and drink and love that does satisfy our hungry hearts. As Christians, we know that we cannot be removed from God even when we think we are. To be estranged is to be in denial about our own existence, which is a work of love—God's divine creativity.
- † Jesus, our living water, turns us to accept our Creator, and ourselves as creatures, and shows us how to live in gratitude for our lives within the divine life. He is the one who leads us to endure the sufferings of life so as to be at one with the fullness of life in God. By Jesus' Spirit, we know here a community of shared love in which we can grow as lovers of one another and our Creator.

† And so we come, to ask, and search and knock, to express the thirst and need and longing for God that is deep within us. And we come to claim the promise that in Jesus Christ, our hunger and thirst are satisfied.

† Mary Oliver, a wonderful American poet, has written a poem called “Thirst.” Not too long ago, she lost her partner of 40 years to cancer. Now her work increasingly reflects her journey of faith—of seeking for and thirsting for—and being found by—God.

† *Another morning and I wake with thirst for the goodness I do not have. I walk out to the pond and all the way God has given us such beautiful lessons. Oh Lord, I was never a quick scholar but sulked and hunched over my books past the hour and the bell; grant me, in your mercy, a little more time. Love for the earth and love for you are having such a long conversation in my heart. Who knows what will finally happen or where I will be sent, yet already I have given a great many things away, expecting to be told to pack nothing, except the prayers which, with this thirst, I am slowly learning.*

† Is there a hole in your heart, are you thirsty, is there an ache in your spirit, an empty space that refuses to be filled no matter how hard you try? Perhaps God created that space, that emptiness, that thirst in you to make you human.

† You might stop the desperate effort to fill it, heal it, satisfy it, and quietly invite Jesus Christ, the love of God incarnate, to come, to take up residence there, in your heart and in your life. In a few moments, we will receive

those means of grace, as John Wesley described them, the bread and unfermented wine, which symbolize the feast that the prophet speaks of.

† How does that happen? Where does our longing for it come from? It is part of the divine mystery through which we are created, along with the whales and the sea turtles and the rest of the wonders of Creation. Won't you be a part of it, be grateful for it, and "Come and get it?"

† For we remember....

*Sources:*

*Boston University Marsh Chapel, Dr. Neville, "While the Lord May be Found,"  
March 14, 2004.*

*John Buchanan, "Thirst," <http://fourthchurch.org>*

*Kate Huey, "Open Invitation," <http://www.ucc.org>*