

Most of us can look back on an experience that we have had in the past where we felt inadequate or that we simply had nothing to offer. It takes me back to one of my first classes in college when I was sitting in a small group of students who seemed to know absolutely everything there was to know about foreign policy and I just felt useless. Maybe for you it was in a new job where you suspected the hiring committee had made a mistake, or when you begin a new chapter in life like marriage or parenthood or caring for a loved one.

Those experiences seem to easily show us what we lack rather than what we bring to the table and it can be really unsettling. Perhaps even right now you're in one of these seasons where physically, spiritually or emotionally, you don't have a lot left to give. We all experience those moments at one time or another and I think that there is a word here for you today. I think that Isaiah offers a curious invitation in our reading today. Let's see who it is addressed to.

Back in verse one he said, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters" and "You who have no money, come buy and eat." He's asking people who are in need, people who lack, who have no money, to come and to take part and to receive. The people of Israel who first heard these words may very well have recognized this as an invitation to come drink from the waters of God's law and wisdom in the Torah. Also, the invitation from lady Wisdom in Proverbs, like you might remember, it echoes here. Who is to come are those who know they lack, those who know that they have nothing to offer in the presence of a holy God. Apparently, these folks have been looking for bread and wine in all the wrong places.

Verse two says, "Why spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy?" When we're looking for what we're searching for in the wrong places, it can be incredibly exhausting. We feel like we reach a dead end. These things that Isaiah speaks of are cheap substitutions for the goodness of God and they don't satisfy, but it seems like the major mistake isn't that the people are giving of their money and toil in the wrong places. It's not their spending or working for anything at all. The invitation that God gives here is to come empty, come hungry, let me lavish my love and care upon you because this is who I am. This is grace.

The rest of the passage opens our eyes to this grace we hear familiar language of an everlasting covenant, one that was promised to David long ago. But God still won't be outdone in his love. This covenant is for God's chosen people, Israel, who first heard these words, but it is also much bigger than that. "Surely you will summon nations you know not and nations you do not know will come running to you," verse five says. Here again, we see God's familiar call for all nations and all peoples to enter into his covenant love. Not only does God speak through Isaiah here to prophesy that all nations and peoples will come into this love, but this message is for us as well. We don't have to bring anything to the table.

I don't have the fortunate memory yet of being at Yates during a time that it hasn't been clouded by a pandemic, so I haven't been able to take part in what I have heard our glorious feast that you often share. But I was raised in a similar context where we often gathered around the table and we brought different foods and desserts and drinks and we all gathered after a Sunday service or on a Wednesday night together. If you have a similar experience, whether it's here at this church or with your family at a Sunday dinner, you know that nothing is worse than when you accidentally (or maybe purposefully and you think that you can get away with it) spoil that dinner when you come to the table not having prepared yourself to receive all of the goodness that is about to be lavished upon you. You can't really enjoy it to its fullest extent.

I think that's the beautiful part of God's invitation here spoken through Isaiah. God doesn't expect us to fill ourselves with all that we can muster, to work to some level of adequacy, to reach a certain point of holiness or intelligence in order to be filled by God's love. God says, "Come, all you who are thirsty, who have no money - and receive, no questions asked."

In our gospel passage today, Jesus took the bread and the fish he blessed it and broke it, and out of nowhere, it multiplied. It became abundant sustenance for those who sat in the grassy fields and there was no explanation for it. But the people came hungry and they were satisfied. Whatever emptiness that you bear today, whatever hunger that you carry deep within your soul, I hope that you can rest in that knowledge that God welcomes that posture and that Jesus came not just to give us life but to give us abundant life to the full.

May we approach God in the full knowledge of his grace and accept that grace he so freely gives. Amen.