

Isaiah 55:1-9
Psalm 63:1-8

1 Corinthians 10:1-13
Luke 13:1-9

In the southwestern United States, where humidity is low, you may be thirsty and not even know it. Your perspiration evaporates so quickly that you do not realize you are becoming dehydrated. So whether you feel thirsty or not, you drink a little water as often as you can. In Grand Canyon National Park there are signs strategically placed along the trails that remind you to stop and drink water. "Stop! Drink water. You are thirsty, whether you realize it or not." According to the prophet Isaiah, there are probably many in our nation who are thirsty, and the worst part is, they do not know it.

When Isaiah wrote these words, the situation had changed. Chapters one to forty are words of judgment and condemnation because of the social injustices of Israel. God's punishment will be the Babylonians, who will conquer the Israelites, destroy much of their land, particularly Jerusalem, and take many of the Israelites away from their homeland to live as exiles, to live as strangers in a strange land. But now, in this chapter the author is giving words of hope. Babylon is about to fall to Cyrus, who would allow the Israelites to return to their homeland. Isaiah uses powerful metaphors to indicate how good it will be.

Our passage begins, "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters...." Everyone gets water. Americans purchase more than 31 billion bottles per year at a cost of about \$11 billion dollars. It is an environmental disaster, and in blind taste tests, tap water time and time again wins hands down. In lab testing, bottled water is no better than tap water. Still, we throw our money away, and buy enough plastic bottles to carpet a path to the moon and back several times over. Water is becoming more precious with

droughts and particularly pollution. Some believe the wars of the future will not be about petroleum, but about water. Isaiah declares that our God will provide water.

Not only does God offer water, God offers free wine and milk. Wine and milk are a step up from water, and indicate that God is really throwing a feast here. Water is considered a basic so God is offering more than just the basics. No longer will the Israelites just be surviving; they will enjoy God's grace and abundance. God provides us not only with water, the basics, but with the good stuff. Milk and wine are metaphors for God's abundance.

The next food staple is bread. Bread was a food staple of the ancient world. You may remember that when the Israelites were wandering around in the wilderness for forty years, every morning God would send mana, a bread like substance, that would appear on the ground. To emphasize their reliance on God than on our own accumulated abundance, if anyone gathered more mana than they needed for the day, the remaining portion would rot and smell to high heaven by the next morning. And on Friday, they got a double portion that would not rot on the next day for that was the Sabbath. God made it possible for the Israelites not to have to gather food on the Sabbath. We are dependent upon God, not our accumulation. Bread is symbolic of what we need, and symbolic of what God provides for us. Bread is a necessity, and anything else is simply a "want." Isaiah questions: "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" The labor that does not satisfy!

Two things here. First of all, do we truly know the difference between a need and a want? Do we truly know the difference between nutritional bread and processed food

filled with high fructose corn syrup, food items with empty calories? Do we really know the difference between water or the empty calories of a bottle of pop? Film actor George Raft, who was noted for portraying sinister gangsters during the 1930s through the 1950s, and was notorious for his gangland associations in real life, acquired and disposed of over ten million dollars in the course of his career. Once chided by a friend for his extravagant spending habits, he was asked what he did with his money. "Part of the loot went for gambling," he explained. "Part went for horses, and part for women. The rest I spent foolishly."

Do we truly know what it is that does not satisfy? What really does bring happiness? Many of the big lottery winners, those who have won tens or even hundreds of millions, many of them say their lives would have been better if they had not won the lottery. One winner declared he wished he would have torn up his winning ticket. Some have committed suicide or have gotten into drugs. Studies have indicated that wealth does not make you any happier. In fact, it may do the opposite. Research has shown that a shorter commute would make you as happy as a 40 percent raise, getting a paid vacation from your boss would make you happier than receiving cash, and having more free time will make you happier than having more money, and yet people often guess that more money is the answer to happiness. Material abundance does not make you happy.

Abundance can kill us. You can literally die of thirst in the middle of the ocean. Our kidneys can only make urine that is less salty than salt water. Therefore, to get rid of all the excess salt taken in by drinking seawater, you have to urinate more water than you drank. Eventually, you die of dehydration. Drinking small amounts will not kill you,

as long as you consume enough fresh water. Thus, you can be out in the middle of an abundance of water. But drinking that water can kill you.

Kari Myers gives some advice: Before making a purchase, financial experts often suggest it is wise to consider questions such as these: Is this a need or a want? (Children are taught this concept in third grade, but many adults still have difficulty distinguishing the two). If the purchase in question is a want, we might ask how will it impact my life? Can I afford it? Is it worth the price? Is there anything I would rather have more? What benefit will it give? Will it make me happy? I have discovered that buying a new car, a new computer, a new suite, a new house, does not make me any happier than I was before? You might be excited for a day or two, or even a few days. In fact many people end up with buyer's remorse within a few days. The last I looked it up in a thesaurus, remorse is not a synonym for happiness.

But even if the purchase is a need, there are still questions to consider. Can I afford it? Is there a less expensive way to satisfy this need? It is with that future in mind that God invites his people into a new way of ordering their lives, which includes not only their spirits but their wallets, too. If we dream God's kingdom dream - a dream of justice and peace, a dream of freedom from anxiety, a dream of God's reign and rule on the earth and in our lives - it will radically alter our priorities. We'll no longer see our money and possessions as ours, but as belonging to God. We will recognize that we are not really owners but stewards, caretakers of the things with which God has entrusted us. If we dream, that dream we'll not be thinking so much about what we acquire as we will about what we can give away. If we dream that dream, we'll begin to

see that we are not alone but part of a community. We'll begin dreaming about how God will use our lives for eternal purposes. It's a dream of freedom!