

ISAIAH 55

Isaiah appeared in Babylon toward the end of the long exile of the Israelites - the Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem, killed many of the people and taken the Israelites as captives to Babylon. The generation of Isaiah had been born in this foreign land. They had no memories of Jerusalem and the God of their grandparents and great grandparents.

Cyrus the Persian was about to invade Babylon and he would take over the country and eventually allow the Israelites to return to their own land.

Second Isaiah is formed by the 16 chapters from 40 to 55. Like Samuel, Kings and Chronicles, Isaiah could have been divided into three books. Second Isaiah from chapters 40 to 60 is the account of God calling his people back to himself and prophesying that he would send a messiah to them. The Israelites were to be a light to the world. This would have been a challenging and difficult message for Isaiah to give to the people. They were barely alive, in captivity, with nothing and little hope. How could they be a light to the world when they felt that their light had almost been extinguished. Remember they sang, how can we sing a love song in a strange land.

Yet God tells them he is still with them, still nearby and he will renew the covenant he made with David that the chosen people would multiply and fill the earth.

In chapter 53 Isaiah described the Messiah in amazing detail 700 years ahead of the birth of Christ, predicting that he would come and suffer and bear the sins of all people and die in our place and rise again.

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted, but he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and with his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

In chapter 54 Isaiah speaks of God's plans for his people, they will spread out across the earth and they will take the message of salvation to gentiles.

In chapter 55, our reading today, God invites the thirsty people to come to the waters and drink and live. He invites his people then and he invites us now to come with nothing because his salvation is free. He will give us more than we expect - water sustains us, milk nourishes us, wine give us pleasure.

And to those who are not interested, not thirsty, distracted by worldly things, he says listen to me and come to me.

Verse 11 contains a beautiful promise – **My word that goes out of from my mouth, it will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and the achieve the purpose for which I sent it.**

God's word as contained in scripture will draw people to him, will change and guide our lives. But of course he also referring to the Word made flesh who came to dwell among us, Jesus Christ himself. Jesus would accomplish what God desired and he achieved the purpose for which he was sent – and still does this work today through his Holy Spirit on earth and through us his chosen people. We are to summon the nations to Christ, we are to send out the great invitation to come and drink, all who are thirsty.

Come all you who are thirsty

Isaiah 55 : 1 – 12

John 4 : 13

Andre preached recently on Jesus' story about the ruler who threw a great banquet and none of the wealthy invited guests came. So he sent for the poor and needy, the outsiders and the unclean, for those who had nothing, to come in and enjoy the feast.

There were two groups of people in this parable – those who had nothing and those who had a lot in the material sense.

The great invitation at the beginning of Isaiah 55 is about two similar groups of people – those who have nothing and those who have a lot.

In verse one – the people are thirsty and broke – or maybe thirsty and broken – **come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters, and you have no money, come and buy and eat**

In verse two – they are self-sufficient and materially rich – but spiritually broke. **Why spend money on what is not bread and your labour on what does not satisfy**

Perhaps you identify today with the people in verse one. Perhaps you have come here today thirsty. Your heart feels like the flowers in a dried up hanging basket, no-one has watered it for a long time.

Maybe you feel like the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision – “The people of Israel said “our bones are dried up and our hope is gone, we are cut off” (Ezekiel 37)

Perhaps old hopes have gone, dreams you held on to have not come about and they are almost forgotten. Your life seems to have gone into dead end streets time and time again, you are lost in a maze, which way to turn now. Empty. Unfulfilled. Dissatisfied. Knowing that there has to be something more to life.

But everything that looks good seems out of reach, in the past, you don't have lots of money, the strength you once had seems to have gone, where is the motivation and energy to change?

Well, one thing you do have is a longing, a thirst. You come into God's house seeking his presence, perhaps Sunday after Sunday.

And the Lord says, you are just the person I am looking for....Come all you who are thirsty, who have no money, no resources, no self esteem, no confidence, no power. Come to me and enjoy the banquet I have prepared for you, come and

If you're not in verse one, thirsty and broke, then you might be in verse two, most of us fit in here at some time if we are honest enough to admit it. –

Why do you spend your money on that which is not bread and your labour for that which does not satisfy?

This person isn't thirsty and broke or broken – yet. He still has money and is spending it, he still has strength and is working, beavering away. Dreaming, chasing, searching, experimenting – I need a different job, I need to go and live in a different place, I'll have a different car, different house, a new computer, i-phone 5, wait the i-phone 6 is about to come out, new books that I might never finish or even start, a new bike that sits in the garage, a new barbeque, a new diet, a new look – this person still has a lot of looking around to do.

But there is no pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Every triumph and success peters out. Retail therapy distracts us for a few hours but the new items are soon tossed to the back of the wardrobe. Even the new luxury ocean going yacht gets boring after a while...so I'm told. Everything new and trendy becomes old and past it.

Spending money on that which does not satisfy, is not bread. Toiling to achieve what does not satisfy.

But all these things can fill our lives, take up our energy, prevent us from having a thirst for things of God, a thirst to come to Christ who is the true Bread of Life, distract us from the Holy Spirit who is kept at a distance, we do not listen and we do not hear what the Holy Spirit has to say to us because of the noise and clutter and distractions in our lives.

Isaiah stresses this, he says "Listen, listen to me" and he says again "Give ear and come to me, hear me, that your soul may live."

Here is a quote from a book - "Human beings have an infinite capacity for distractions" That is a quote from a book written by Neil Postman entitled "Amusing Ourselves to Death." He mainly looks at the mind numbing effects of television which is a supreme distraction for many. But the internet has to be one the biggest modern day distractions. As I said a couple of weeks ago, the internet brings us things that are inspirational and encouraging but it also brings things that are mind numbing and useless and pointless – but addictive!

A friend posted on Facebook the other day the comment -

I go on-line to watch a music video and five hours later I'm watching a tutorial on how to talk to a giraffe!

A Christian singer-songwriter Garth Hewitt picked up this theme in song lyrics –

We're amusing ourselves to death
We're giggling as we go
We're the dance band on the Titanic
And nobody wants to know
Anything to stop us thinking
Anything to give us a thrill
We've chosen the path of pleasure
Even if it kills

I sat in my conservatory at the back of the house with a cup of tea yesterday at 6 am, wondering what else God wanted me to say in this sermon today. I had reached this point and had no sense of where God wanted me to go with it. The sun was rising in the sky and glowing through the clouds, a dove came and alighted on the glass conservatory roof right above the sun. An awesome moment, the presence of God, the Holy Spirit filling the room.....and the words over and over again - Jesus wept.

The shortest verse in the bible but hundreds of sermons could be preached on these two words. John 11 : 35 **Jesus wept**

Why did Jesus weep? His friend Lazarus has died, he has been lying in his grave for four days. But he was not weeping for Lazarus, he was not weeping for the dead, he was weeping for the living.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. Jesus wept.

Jesus weeps for the living.

He weeps for the hungry and the refugees

He weeps for the lost and the lonely

He weeps for those mourning loss – loss of a loved one, of health, of home, of job, of opportunities

He weeps for the man in his private jet with ten houses but no home

He weeps for his children who love him, for his bride the church

He weeps for those who do not know him

He weeps for those who have heard of him and rejected him

The image of our Saviour weeping is a powerful one.

When we hear that great invitation “**Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters,**” we can think of the waters of baptism and the symbolism of the holy spirit but maybe we can also think of the water of Jesus’ tears. Come to the waters, come and see my tears, come and let my tears wash over you.

On the cross, Jesus blood flowed down for us and we can be sure that his tears flowed too – not tears of pain or self pity, but tears of love – see from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down.

The words of Isaiah invited us to come to the waters hundreds of years before Jesus came to live with us. Jesus himself repeated the invitation.

Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well **Everyone who drinks this water (from the well) will be thirsty again but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst again. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (John 4 : 13)**

Jesus spoke these words quietly to the woman in a conversation – later he stood up in the crowded temple court in Jerusalem and said **in a loud voice “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.”**

The scripture Jesus is referring to is Isaiah 58 : 11 – **The Lord will guide you always, he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.**

I referred earlier to God speaking to Ezekiel about the dry bones of the people of Israel, and God said to the people “I will put my spirit in you and you will live” Another reference to watering dry places through the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. (Ezekiel 37 : 14)

And the last verses of our reading today in Isaiah 55 – You will go out with joy and be led forth in peace, the mountains and hills will burst into song before you and all the trees of the field will clap their hands

There is great rejoicing in heaven when one thirsty person comes to the living water, stoops down and drinks.

**I came to Jesus and I drank of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched my soul revived
And now I live in Him**

Amen