

My Soul Thirsts
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
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Isaiah 55:1-9

¹ Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

³ Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁴ See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.

⁵ See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

⁶ Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;

⁷ let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;

let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Psalms 63:1-8

¹ O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,

as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
² So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
 beholding your power and glory.
³ Because your steadfast love is better than life,
 my lips will praise you.
⁴ So I will bless you as long as I live;
 I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

⁵ My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
 and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
⁶ when I think of you on my bed,
 and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
⁷ for you have been my help,
 and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.
⁸ My soul clings to you;
 your right hand upholds me.

We, from this congregation, have driven down to Libertyville, Illinois, twice in recent years to volunteer time at a place called Feed My Starving Children (FMSC). According to their website, FMSC was founded in 1987 and is “committed to feeding God's children hungry in body and spirit. The approach is simple: volunteers hand-pack meals specially formulated for malnourished children, and we send them to partners around the world where they're used to operate orphanages, schools, clinics and feeding programs to break the cycle of poverty.”¹

The first part of our time there is a volunteer orientation, during which we learn about the specific food we are about to pack – whether it's the Rice Manna Pack or one of the two types of Potato Manna Pack – and we learn about the need in the country to which the food we pack will be shipped. This involves both slides and short videos. In one of the orientation sequences, we learn that in some of the places where people are malnourished, they form dirt biscuits to fill their stomachs. They're made of dirt, water, and oil, salt, or butter. The image you see on the screen is from FMSC's Flickr account and it shows a woman preparing a batch of these dirt biscuits, which will dry in the sun and then she will sell them to those who are hungry and unable to find or afford anything else to eat. These dirt biscuits keep

¹ <https://www.fmsc.org/about>

children's (and adults') bellies full through the night so they can sleep. Any satisfaction they bring is temporary; any nutrition they provide is minimal.

We do well to acknowledge our fortune to have been born here in the circumstances into which we were born. We do not need to feed from the ground itself. Perhaps out of an abundance you have, you may wish to support the nourishment of these children so they might regain health and hope for a future. If you cannot make the trip to Libertyville, you can still support the work of Feed My Starving Children through donations made through their website.²

I tell you about these dirt biscuits because, while **we** may not literally eat them, we have tasted them figuratively. Isaiah asks, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" Physical hunger is certainly around us, maybe even in our own homes, but Isaiah's question is about another hunger which is within us all. We, as humans, are notorious for spending our days and our years and our lives using our currencies of time and energy to buy the temporary. We spend our labor toiling toward an unrewarding outcome. We are eating dirt biscuits hoping they will nourish us and give us the support we need to survive. And they do not. They fill us up for a time but never well and never enough.

Generations before us, the Israelites did the same. The thirst is never quenched and the hunger is never sated. And yet just before us and around us is that which will satisfy. It's not even required that we bring anything in exchange. At the end of our reading from Isaiah, God speaks and says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways." God's ways include sharing waters and food with those who can offer nothing in return. God offers wine and milk without price. The FMSC website defines manna as "something of value that a person receives unexpectedly."³ God offers freely, and for free, food which is good, rich food, a rich feast. All we need do to replace our dirt biscuits with this food for life is to go to the waters, to look upon God in the sanctuary.

² www.fmsc.org

³ <http://www.fmsc.org/mannapack>

We have a deep hunger for a meaningful life, both one that is meaningful to us and one where we contribute meaning. We thirst for this, we faint for this, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. The water is right before us – not an oasis but real and present. What are the waters? The waters are scripture; the waters are God’s presence. How you get there is up to you. I looked around at home and saw the detritus of spiritual practices of years past and first saw them as failures in discipline. And then I realized that they were not failures. As Thomas Edison said, “I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.”⁴ If **you** have tried to commit to a way to come into God’s presence and have left that way behind, you have not failed. You simply need to try a new way. Again and again until you find the bridge to the waters, until you find your entry into the sanctuary.

Of course, even without seeking, sometimes we stumble into the waters, sometimes we trip over the threshold, sometimes we find in our cupped hands a deep drink from our source. And what does the psalmist model for us in those flashes of grace? “I will lift up my hands and call on your name.” When you find manna falling upon your eyelashes and arms and shoulders, that thing of value received unexpectedly, when you understand how valuable the grace, can you imagine lifting up your hands? To do so is unabashed, raw, vulnerable, truly shame-less, without being ashamed of your intense gratitude. If you treasure the presence of God even in your groggiest of moments, on your bed, in the watches of the night, then surely God is worthy of such bold and carefree thanks.

Our souls thirst and God provides. Let us seek not those things which fill us for the night, empty of substance, and a pale imitation of that for which we really hunger. Instead let us seek that which God can provide: good food, a feast, life. This is a hard task for us to remember, harder still to which to commit. As part of the insurance program of the Presbyterian Church, I have signed on to a six-week self-improvement webinar called “Change Your Habits, Change Your Life,” as one way to earn a reduced deductible. Last week, week three, provided one of the biggest insights for me: habits are built upon many tiny habits. To make a new habit, you find a way to do it one percent better than you did the day before. I can’t tell you where to find your path to the waters; I can’t tell you how to set

⁴ <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/t/thomasaed132683.html>

aside the dirt biscuit for rich food. What I can do is encourage you to drink in those waters one percent more today than you did yesterday, and one percent more tomorrow than you did today. So may it be for you and for me.

Let us pray: Feed us and give us to drink for life, O Lord, we pray. Amen.