

Dive-in Discipleship
Isaiah 55:1-9
November 12, 2023

In our November newsletter, the Valley Voice, I reprinted my very first Valley Voice article from January of 2010. When I learned I was preaching today, I thought it might be kind of cool if I repeated the first sermon I ever gave at Valley back in March of 2010. In that sermon, I introduced myself as the Pastor of Discipleship by saying, "It is my task to help you drink deeply of God."

However, as I read that sermon, I realized that this church is not the same church as it was 14 years ago. I am not the same pastor as I was 14 years ago. A sermon written exactly as it was 14 years ago is not going to cut it.

I am going to use the same scripture passage and bits and pieces of my 14 year old sermon, but the rest is geared to who you and I are today.

As we prepare to hear God's word, let us pray. Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

Read Isaiah 55:1-9

I want you to think about an invitation you received, whether it was to a wedding, a party, an invite to dinner and a movie. A response is in order, especially if the invitation has a RSVP. You can joyfully accept it, politely decline it, or send a not sure.

Our scripture passage today is an invitation. "Come," God says. And why not? There is free food. Come, buy without money. There is free booze. Come, buy wine without money. There is guaranteed entrance. All you need to do is show up. Come.

This sounds like those ads that say: Bad credit loans fast and easy. Cash now. No credit check. We buy titles. Get approved in 60 seconds. Here it is in our scripture: buy wine and milk without money and without price.

This is nothing unusual, God is always sending out invitations in the Bible...

In the book of Joel, "Turn to me with all your heart," God says. For God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and full of kindness.

And of course, Jesus was always extending invitations.

“Come to me,” Jesus say, “all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Mt 11:28)

Echoing our passage, Jesus says in the Gospel of John, “If anyone thirsts, let them come to me and drink” (Jn 7:37).

And echoing free food, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger,” (John 6:35).

And at the end of the Bible in Revelation, in the very last chapter of the Bible: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come’ ...And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price” (Rev 22:17). Sounds like our scripture passage. The words of an old prophet, Isaiah, connected to the words at the end of time. Because it is an everlasting promise.

In order to understand this invitation, we need to understand the context in which it was delivered. The people of God are in exile because they had walked away from God. Yet, God does not forget them or leave them or give up on them. Using the prophet Isaiah, God comforts them while they are in captivity. God is giving them hope.

Thus, God sends an invitation to come. This invitation is sent to those who are thirsty and broke. Come if you are thirsty. Come if you have no money.

Perhaps you have come this morning with thirst in your heart. Perhaps dreams and old hopes have dried up. You have a longing. For more. Come, God says.

But God doesn't call just to the thirsty and poor. God calls out to those who have it all, to those who do have money and are spending it. “Why spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy?”

What is the invitation? We are offered water, milk, wine.

Water. It is what we need to live. When we are the most thirsty, it is water we want. “He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul” (Psalm 23). God invites you to receive refreshment, life-giving water to restore you.

Milk. Milk is needed for ongoing nourishment. It is given for us to grow and for health. We are invited to receive the milk so we can be stable and strong.

Wine. Wine makes you feel good. Wine is for enjoyment. One pastor (John Piper) describes it like this: Wine is “for shouting and singing and dancing and playing and skipping and running and jumping and laughing.”

So, God gives us water to live; God gives us milk to be healthy and strong. God gives us wine to enjoy life. “Listen...and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.” This is top quality stuff. And there is lots of it. Jesus said, “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14).

This is a really great invitation. It tells us to drop-by and stay. We are invited to embrace the abundant life in the presence of God.

“Come,” God says. Not once, not twice, but four times. Look at them again with me:

“**Come**, all you who are thirsty, **come** to the waters; and you who have no money, **come**, buy and eat! **Come**, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”

This is not an invitation to drop by for a few minutes. This is an invitation to stay.

Drink deeply. Buy. Eat. Partake. Experience. Taste. Savor the goodness of God.

Then listen. Notice how many times it is repeated. Read verse 2 – 3a: “Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the riches of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. “

To listen to God is repeated 4 times – just like come. God is saying, this is important. I am repeating it over and over again so you can get it. Come and listen to me. Don’t drop by. Stay. Be attuned to my voice. Turn off those other voices for a while. Learn to hear my voice. Delight in it. Eat what is good.

And it is free. It satisfies. It’s abundant. It’s everlasting. It gives life.

How will you respond to this invitation? You can joyfully accept it, politely decline it, or send a not sure.

Over the years, I have watched you partake in the riches of God’s table. I have watched you grow and deepen your faith. I have delighted when you came into my office and shared what God was doing in your life, in your soul.

When I put the call out to write a devotion for the email blast or for our Advent Devotional, you respond. Some of you said this was the first time you did such a thing, and you were able to express your faith in the written word in such beautiful ways.

There are times in worship when Pastor Craig and I can sense the Holy Spirit moving in your hearts in the silence as we pray, in the belting out of hymns and enjoying the choir, in your desire to learn God's word. We know your thirst for God as you come and listen.

When Craig and I and other teachers lead classes, we delight in how God is working in your hearts through the Word.

This is a very active church. Who would have thought in a retirement community? And we love that you are so involved with Patio Sale and Missions and quilts and prayer shawls and in committees and in leadership roles such as Elders and Deacons, and so on. We love that you are out in the community serving its needs, such as Rotary Club, Valley Assistance Services, Friends in Deed, the Food Bank. You are amazing.

Yet, I have watched many of you burn out. I have witnessed you saying "yes" to too many things. And out of it comes anger, weariness, illness.

So here is my advice as the outgoing Pastor of Discipleship: do not neglect your souls. Do not neglect your relationship with God. Christianity is not a fast-food religion. It is more like a long, sumptuous dinner, lingering over the meal, savoring the taste, enjoying the conversation.

I encourage you to continue lingering with God. I know many of you get a cup of coffee in the morning and then sit down with the devotional found in the daily email blasts. And you linger for a while. (By the way, these email blasts come out Monday through Friday. If you are not receiving them and would like to, talk to me.) Come and listen.

We have an Advent Devotional coming out on Thanksgiving. It is written by 20 of our church members reflecting on their favorite Christmas carols. Linger and stay awhile as you read them. Come and listen.

In 2024, the Faith Formation Committee will be having several one-day retreats bringing in outside speakers to speak to your soul. One will be in January and one next Fall. Come and listen.

Join a women's circle or a men's Bible study to feast on the Bible. Come to Pastor Craig's class on Mondays as they go through the Bible chapter by chapter. Or, come to Chuck Ramsay's class called The Book on Thursdays to study the Bible book by book. We say the Bible is living because God speaks through it. Feast on it. Come and listen.

Some of you have your own small group to study a book or scripture. If God moves in your heart to do so, find 3 or 4 others and get started. Come and listen.

And of course, worship. Come and listen to each part...the words in the liturgy, the poems of the hymns, the music that reaches inside, the preaching that opens the scriptures. Come and listen.

At the end of our passage, God says my ways and thoughts are not your ways and thoughts. It is this otherness of God that offers us rich food and living water without price.

Come and listen, God invites. I pray you joyfully accept. I propose to you today, a dive-in discipleship. I don't want you to just stick in your big toe into the water, I invite you to plunge in head first to all that God offers. Embrace the abundant life of God. It is the richest of fares. Amen.