

Pastor T.C. Arnold
20th Sunday after Trinity
Isaiah 55:1-5
October 9, 2016

Is bigger always better? Some maintain that it is, but it's not always true. When we receive mail, I prefer the little envelopes over the larger one. The little ones are usually notes from friends or loved ones. The big ones are usually junk mail. The same with emails. The shorter notes are from friends or parishioners. The larger ones with pictures can usually be marked as spam and deleted immediately.

Sometimes the "small" mail are invitations. Those can be exciting. Where are we to go? What is the occasion? Who will be there? Exciting!! Our Lord offers us an invitation. It's an invitation to love, to share, to give, but most importantly, to receive. This celebration is one we don't want to miss.

It's true that some invitations do not come in envelopes. Some are printed in other forms. The one I'm talking about is printed in the Word of God for all to see and hear. This invite is open to all. It's not personally addressed, but you are welcome. You are invited to attend.

God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, sends out flyers, puts up billboards, uses prime-time advertising to issue this invitation: "*Come, all you who are thirst, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat.*" God does not have restrictions regarding proper clothes, time, or ability. He wants this message sent out to everyone, and no one is excluded. There is nothing in us that can stop God from reaching out; the invitation depends on His love alone.

You see, we cannot buy and eat from the Lord. We have no "God currency". We have nothing to offer God in exchange for the gifts that He offers us. We have nothing in and of ourselves to offer God. We are empty. All we have are our misdeeds, our lies, our indiscretions. We come before God with empty hands... or if we have anything to offer in our hands it is nothing that God needs. We have nothing to claim as our own. We have nothing apart from Him. God calls us to come and buy without money because we have no money. We have nothing.

The problem we see all too often is that we think we really have something... when we have nothing. It's mine to offer. It's my time, it's my talent, and it's my treasure. You see, I'm really something because of what I have. I have charisma. I've got what it takes. I've got the skills – more than you, of course. It's mine. I'm sorry you don't have it. It's too bad. See what I can do. Look at me. Stop and take notes because I'm all that and a bag of chips. It's really too bad you don't have what I have. I feel bad for you... any of us are given to think.

And worse yet, when someone else gets praised because of the fine job they did, we aren't happy for them. We wonder where our praise is. Where is my recognition? All of it becomes a competition in this game called life. Are you winning? Are you doing better than your neighbor and are people giving you the credit? Do you have it and everyone is envious?

Let's go back to that small and unassuming invitation found in the Old Testament text for today. "*Come, everyone who thirst...*" God invites those who thirst... If you are all that and you HAVE all that, why does God invite the thirsty? "*And he who has no money, come, buy and eat...*" God invites those who are hungry. If you are all that and you HAVE all that, why does God invite the hungry? "*Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?*"

This invitation to a great banquet given by our Lord to those who have nothing, reminds me of what happened to a dear friend, a mentor, a brother and a father in the faith this past week. Have you ever successfully pulled off a big surprise banquet? That's what we did for Pastor Hal Senkbeil who celebrated 45 years in the ministry. It took a lot of planning to pull off the ruse. We had to do a little sanctified lying... which I'm convinced is not a sin because there isn't ill intent, but rather a blessed end. He was absolutely surprised. We honored a man for his servanthood as a pastor in the parish and as a pastor to pastors for many years. What meant the most to him was not all the "honor-speak" he received and all the positive acclamation, but rather that he got to enjoy the evening with his friends and family who came from great distances to be there. His wife and three adult children drove down from Wisconsin that afternoon to join in on the celebration.

We could say that none was more deserving... as this invitation was for one particular person. But the banquet our Lord provides for us free of charge – the feast of heavenly glory – the feast of faith and life and forgiveness, is one that goes out to you. "Come with nothing" says the Lord. "I give you everything you need," says the Lord. "It is provided for your goodness. It is given out of love. It is for you today and forevermore."

And so we see what we have... nothing without the Lord. We see how we eat with nothing from ourselves. We see how we live with nothing without the Lord. We see that God the Father has provided all that we have for the body and life... including the death of His Son Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. We see how it all belongs to Him and we are called to be caretakers of what God provides... even the stuff that we say, "That's mine." Yes, and no... that belongs to the King of all kings as well.

If you have been keeping your eye on the political debates – both presidential and vice-presidential – you notice there is a lot of talk about what the other candidate has done wrong and what the other candidate has not done right. It's all about what they do or don't do. And that is the way it goes when people are running for office. The candidates want to show you what they can do... and what trouble you will be in if you elect the other person because they will do something you don't want them to do. This is how the country goes – for better or for worse... I emphasize "for worse."

But this is not how we get things done around here. We work together while at the same time realizing it's not about me... getting elected... being the top dog... but us using what God has provided for service to this place and, most importantly, to our neighbor through this place. Because when we use the God-given talents and the God-given treasures for the sake of His work here, our neighbor benefits.

Today is our Stewardship Sunday. We reflect on those God-given talents and treasures that come to us from our Lord for the sake of our neighbor. How will you serve your neighbor? I mentioned a couple of weeks ago about that "one more thing" that I want you to consider regarding your time and talent. Remember, this is for the sake of God's work. This is for the sake of those who are blessed by God through you. Be a blessing, beloved in the Lord.

Is bigger always better? Let's ask the Guy family over here. There is little Ethan, baptized into the faith. Is anything in this world more precious than him? Is bigger better? The unassuming way our Savior died. The death He died for you, oh you of no consequence. The life that is bigger than anything we could imagine and yet each of us has all of it. The invitation is ours... to live... to serve. The Lord blesses His children – big or small – with the invitation of life and service. This is our Christian life, beloved in the Lord. It has been won for us by our inviting Lord. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.