

Pastor T.C. Arnold
20th Sunday after Trinity
Isaiah 55:1-9
Oct. 21st, 2012

Picture in your mind a crowded marketplace on a city street. You are right in the middle of it. Vender after vender packed in together attempting to entice you to purchase their product. Thousands of people walk through the market each day. With such a crowd of people come loud shouts, yelling of all kinds, and vendors attempting to make deals by bartering with customers. The scene is chaotic. The noise is deafening. And, from it all, comes a voice you recognize.

A voice calls out over all the other voices – and it calls out to you. It says, “*Come, everyone who thirst, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*” Who could possibly sell without receiving anything in return? Who could possibly give their product away for free? There is only one – and you know who.

As the Lord gives you what you need without any price from you, our Lord, at the same time, wonders, “why do you spend what you have been given on the things that do not matter?” The Lord gives you what you need and yet the frivolous things of life are what we will give so much of ourselves for. We spend our money on what we do not need and yet what we really need is given to us free of charge.

In his book called, the *Seduction of Extremes*, the Rev. Dr. Peter Kurowski points out how the Bible is filled with paradoxes. A paradox is a wedding of two seemingly contradictory truths that form a deeper truth. For example, the cross in the Bible is a paradox. It’s an instrument of death and yet the instrument of life. It is the place of curse and the source of blessings. It is ugly yet beautiful. In the Bible the Eternal God dies. In death, Jesus gives life. Jesus is rejected so that we are accepted. Paradox is seen in the text for today, “*Come and buy without money and without price.*” Only with God is it possible to have something that seems to be impossible, possible.

And with God, the impossible is made possible. Just like in that Gospel text for today. A king gives a wedding banquet and the guests who were invited did not come. Who would not come to a great banquet that their king had invited them to? Well, the truth is, many of us ignore the invitation. And then, what seems even more strange is that the king then sent to have whoever they may find on the roads, whoever it may be – both good and bad – to come to the wedding feast. Impossible! God wouldn’t do that – invite just “anyone” to the greatest of all banquets!

Last week Pastor Froiland rightly alluded to the fact that if we want to see where our hearts lie, look at what we buy. Invited by the King of all kings to this place to receive the free gift of forgiveness of sins, to be in the midst of the Lord’s precious words of salvation, to grow in the Christian life that God has given to us to live with our fellow believers, we aren’t good about heeding that invitation. We would much rather put our heart on other things. God calls out from His booth at the marketplace, “*Come, everyone who thirsts, come eat, come and buy without money.*” Yet, it’s not an invitation we heed. The hearts of the people in the world are set on worldly things.

We perhaps take for granted what doesn’t cost us anything. We say, “Nothing is free. It can’t be.” With every claim that if you “call now, you will receive a copy of my DVD on how to make millions of dollars,” is followed by, “Now this is what you will need purchase in order to start making those millions.” We rationalize that nothing is free – and if it is free – then it’s too good to be true. I would rather not stick around to find out.

And it is true, nothing is for free. They say freedom is not free. That's very true. We know about the men and women of our armed forces that give up everything for your freedom. We do understand how that works, though we often take it for granted. Sometimes wars are fought for freedom – a soldier's death at the hands of enemies to protect our sovereignty. It is that way with our forgiveness of sins as well. It's a free gift to us but it wasn't free. Jesus paid that price. He was the perfect sacrifice. He was totally innocent, but took on all punishment. Look – another paradox. Jesus was sinless but took on every sin upon Himself on the cross – paradox. Jesus gives what was not free for free – paradox.

Why does God do such strange things that seem like contradictions but aren't contradictions at all? Our Lord answers that question in the Old Testament text for today, "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*" The Lord has ways and thoughts that are far beyond our ways and our thoughts.

So if you have ever asked God the question "Why?" (and, we have all asked this question), don't be surprised when He doesn't give you the answer you are looking for. His ways aren't your ways and that's what we need to know. He works in ways that allude us – and I'm not sure why but we know this to be the truth. His ways are hidden from our understanding and He is clear that His ways and thoughts are not like our own. He does things like: bring life from death, and makes Himself nothing so that you will have everything. Those are strange ways. But they are His ways and I promise you, God does know better than you and me.

"*Come and buy without money or without price,*" says our Lord – when we enter this place and receive His precious life in Body and blood. "*My thoughts and ways are not your thoughts and ways,*" says our Lord. And who would have thought that God would attach a promise of forgiveness and family membership to water at a place like that Baptismal Font over there (the baptism of baby Dominic). We think, "How?" But there can be no doubt when God makes a promise that He makes good on it, even when we can't put our mind around it... "*My thoughts and ways are not yours...*"

Our suffering and our distresses leave us feeling confused. The reason: because we don't understand – and sometimes we just can't. It's as simple as that. Our sufferings, our discouragements our distress is real and God knows it all. But we still ask; "Why, God?" And all we can do to understand is to see how He answers, "*My thoughts and ways are not yours.*"

It doesn't satisfy our need to have answers. We will never completely understand. But through it all, please don't forget the paradox of our faith. *The eternal God is given into death so that you might live.* Try to wrap your mind around that one. We have heard it so many times we get it – and it's true – and truly for you. Jesus, the Lord, came to die so that you might live. He gives life in death. We have salvation in His condemnation. And how God, in His strange ways, turns suffering into righteous, perhaps we can at least begin to understand how we can possibly buy milk and wine without money or price. It is all given. It is given to you. In God's way it is yours. Thanks be to God. Amen

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