

“Avoiding Junk Food”

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Isaiah 55:1-13

- 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.

- 10 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
12 For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

THIRSTY AND SOMETIMES WE DON'T KNOW IT

We who live in Central Florida know what it means to be thirsty.
We step outside into that heat and humidity,
and the perspiration immediately begins to drip.

We need water.

Have you ever spent a day at one of the theme parks in the summer?
No one had to tell you to drink.

It was necessary.
It was what you needed.

And you were willing to pay any price in order to get it!

Some say that many of us don't drink enough water.
I've seen folks bring jugs of water to work and try to drink it all before the
day is over in order to get their daily quota of water.

But, did you know that there are some places where the need for water is not so obvious?

In the southwestern United States
the humidity is very low.

You may be thirsty and not even know it.

Perspiration evaporates so quickly that you don't realize that you're becoming dehydrated.

So, whether you feel thirsty or not it's necessary to stop often and drink a little water.

I'm told that in Grand Canyon National Park, there are signs placed along the trails to remind you to stop and take a drink.

"Stop! Drink water.
You are thirsty,
whether you realize it or not."

Sometimes we know that we are thirsty.
Sometimes we have no clue.

A THIRSTY LIFE

This applies to other areas of our life as well.

There are times when we know that we need something, and we thirst for those things.

We pursue those things.

But, there are other times
when we do not feel "thirsty."
And yet this lack of thirst is deceptive.

Unbeknownst to us
our life has dried up in some way.
We are in desperate need of something that we lack.

Isaiah's words are like a sign in the desert
for the spiritually unaware.

“Stop. Drink water.
You are thirsty whether you know it or not.”

You see, the prophet is not just speaking to exiles long ago. The prophet is speaking to you and me, here and now.

We are thirsty for what Jesus would call “living water”, and yet most of the time we just don’t know it.

We are spiritually unaware.

LIVING WATER READILY AVAILABLE

But, despite our lack of awareness,
what we really need is readily available.

Water is so essential that we have water fountains in almost every public building.

At a restaurant, the one thing that doesn’t cost extra (usually) is water.

Water is a matter of life and death.

We can’t live without an adequate amount of water.
The same is true of food.

We need to remember that when Isaiah wrote this message, he wrote to exiles in Babylon.

For this powerless group obtaining food and water was not a given.

Some didn’t know where their next meal was coming from. Some didn’t have access to cool, refreshing water.

Sadly this is still true in many parts of the world.
The scarcity of food and water is still a threat to life.

But, the prophet envisions a new day,
when all will have something to eat and drink.

Let me paint a picture for you.

Think about all those folks who wait
on the off ramps of the Turnpike.
You know the ones.
They hold up signs that say,

“Will work for food.”

Now imagine someone saying to those folks,
“Follow me to Publix.”

So they do.
And this person tells the manager,

“See these people.
Let them have all the food and drink they want.”

Can you imagine those folks pushing their loaded shopping carts through
the checkout and paying only with a smile and a wave?

That’s the image that the prophet paints.
In a time of scarcity, exiles are invited to a banquet at no cost.

This is a vision of God’s grace.

God gives God’s people what they need most.
There is no excuse for anyone to be hungry or thirsty because it’s all paid
for.

HARD WORK AND NO JOY

But, there’s another surprise in this passage.
Though the nutritious food and water is readily available without charge,

God’s people do not avail themselves of this opportunity.

Instead, they spend their money for that which is not bread, and work for
things that don’t satisfy.

God’s people reject free nutritious meals,
and instead spend their money on things that do not satisfy.

They worked hard.
But, the things they buy are really worthless trinkets.

Doesn't this describe our society?
There's a popular TV show on Netflix entitled, "Tidying Up".

Marie Kondo helps her audience learn the Japanese way to get the clutter out of their lives.

For example, if you have a closet full of ties that you haven't worn for a while, and you don't plan to wear them ever again,

you take that tie, thank it for its service to you, and then throw it away.

Her philosophy goes something like this:
If something doesn't bring you joy, then you need to let it go.

I have a whole closet full of ties
that don't bring me joy!
In fact, I would say if I wore those ties they wouldn't bring you much joy either!

But, more than just ties, I have a lot of things in my life that I paid good money for,
and yet now I look at those things and wonder,
"Why in the world did I buy that?"

As the passage for today puts it,
"We work for things that do not satisfy."

And there's a reason we do that.
We take our cues from culture
instead of God's Word.

Not everyone who was exiled from the Promised Land longed to go back home.

Some of the exiles became quite satisfied in Babylon.

They set up businesses.

They learned the language.

In fact, some of their children spoke nothing but the language of the Babylonians.

But, when God's people adapted and adopted the culture of their oppressors, they lost the one thing that was most important.

They lost their identity.

They no longer remembered
who they were or whose they were.

They settled for the junk food of Babylon when they were heirs to the milk and honey of the Promised Land.

JUNK FOOD

Our passage for today talks about the power of God's word. God's Word is like the rain that makes the harvest possible.

God's Word *always*
accomplishes its purpose. (55:11)

This prophet wrote long ago and addressed a situation that is much different from ours.

And yet, the message still resonates.

We're still eating junk food
instead of good, healthy food.

That's literally true.

Despite warnings to the contrary,
junk foods of various kinds continue to be a staple of the American diet.

In fact we've learned that junk food can be addictive.

When we eat highly processed, high sugar, high fat foods, we want even more of it.

Why? Because we're not getting what our bodies really need with these
junk foods

...so we crave even more food that does not satisfy.

It's a vicious cycle.
We spend our money on that which is not bread.

But, of course the prophet was talking about more than junk food.

He was talking about how God's people often had a thirst for things that didn't satisfy.

The people worked hard.
But, their work didn't bring them satisfaction. (55:2)

LISTENING TO THE WRONG PEOPLE

Why were the people so hungry for the wrong things?

Because they were listening to the wrong people.
They had adopted the ways of the Babylonians.

In order to hunger and thirst for things that are truly healthy, the first thing we need to do is start listening to the right people.

That's not easy to do.
Many folks make their money by creating an unhealthy thirst in our lives,
a hunger that is never satisfied.

That's the whole point of advertising.
It's no wonder we're addicted to junk food.

Next time you watch TV count the number of times a fast food restaurant is advertised.

I'll bet you can even sing the jingles by heart.
I know I can. I even remember commercials that are aired many years ago.

(You deserve a break today. So get up and get away.)

How many commercials suggest
that if you own that luxury car,
that you will somehow become suave or sophisticated?

(I'm cool. I've got that Lincoln with the neat looking buttons.)

Politicians also seek to control us
by creating a hunger in our heart.
We don't have what we need and only by voting for this particular person
will our needs be filled.

The prophet Isaiah tells us,
"Don't listen to these folks.
You need more than junk food.
You need more than empty promises.
You need real food.
You need the bread of heaven."

You need to listen...not to these purveyors of dissatisfaction and junk food.
...you need to listen to the Word of the Lord.

Only the Word of the Lord can help us escape the clutches of the Babylo-
nian Captivity.
Only the Word of the Lord can help us find nutritious food that will help us
grow in faith.

REMEMBERING WHO WE ARE

The prophet then reminds these captives of who they were and who they
are called to be.

They are not captives.
They are descendants of David.
They are heirs to the Promised Land.

They are God's People.

Live like who you are instead of bowing to the will of your captors. Believe
that the power of God's Word.
Trust in the fact that God's promises are stronger than the powers that be.

In our day, the prophet would tell us, you are more than what the folks on
TV say you are. You are more than just a person who works day and night
in order to consume even more and more.

You are God's child.
 You have been granted the freedom
 to eat for free at the heavenly banquet.

Why do you work like a dog for things
 that do not satisfy?
 Why do you waste your time eating junk food when rich, nutritious food is
 available at the Lord's Table?

One of the reasons we fall prey to the purveyors of "junk food" is that we
 have thoughtlessly accepted their assumptions. Or to put it another way,
 we have succumbed to temptation.

Remember how we started this Lenten journey to Jerusalem? We started it
 by thinking about the temptations of Jesus.

And his first temptation was to live by bread alone. But, Jesus replied to
 that temptation by quoting Scripture. He said we don't live by bread alone.
 We live by the Word of God.

THE NO JUDGEMENT ZONE

So what is this Word that feeds us what we're really hungering for?

What is this Word that gives us what we're really thirsty for?

The prophet said that it's a Word of repentance and forgiveness.

The prophet said that we don't have to be slaves to junk food. We can re-
 pent.

We can go in a different direction because we have a God who is gracious.
 We have a God who desires to welcome us back home.

It's like that commercial for a local gym.

If you're trying to be more healthy
 and become more physically fit,
 a gym can be a rather daunting place.
 If you haven't worked out in a long time, you're likely to feel out of place.

But, this gym advertises itself as a
“no judgment zone”.

Now I don't know if that's really true.
But, I could see why it's an attractive idea.

When you're trying to repent,
when you're trying to go in a different direction,
it helps to know that you're in a no judgment zone.

Well, that's what the prophet promises God's people.
They're in a “no judgment zone”.

God abundantly pardons.
God has mercy on His people. (55:7)

We live in a culture that is definitely
a high judgment zone.

TV, social media, politics, religion...all areas of life are often filled with the
most biting and destructive criticism.

And this constant drumbeat of judgment takes its toll.

The UN took a poll and rated the world's happiest countries.

Our country slipped down one notch this year to number 19.

We are a superpower.
We have more resources than anyone else.
And yet we are number 19 on the list.

When you consider all that we have,
why are we so unhappy?

Maybe it's because we thirst and hunger for things that do not satisfy.

Maybe it's because many of us live in a world of condemnation and fear in-
stead of God's
no judgment zone.

Instead of dining on junk food every day,
maybe we need to dine on the Word of God.
When we hear God's Word, we realize that God's vision is radically different from the ways of the world.

The prophet wrote that God's thoughts are not our thoughts.

God's ways are not our ways.

Indeed, there's no comparison.
As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are God's ways higher than our ways.

We say that the leopard can't change his spots.
But, God says, "Who made the leopard?"

AN IMAGE OF JOY

In this passage, the prophet imagines a time when Exiles will come back home.

They will be filled with joy and peace.
The mountains will sing songs.
The trees will clap their hands.

Don't underestimate the power of
that vision.

Several weeks ago my wife and I watched Fantasmic at Disney's Hollywood Studios.
And folks cheered wildly for a person dressed up in a mouse suit fighting imaginary villains!

How does that happen?
The stories we tell have a profound effect on us.
Most of us grew up with these Disney tales and so we're attached to them emotionally.

I like the fact that these stories
bring so many people joy.

But, the prophet Isaiah asks us to imagine something even more joyful.

He asks us to imagine the mountains singing and the trees clapping their hands as exiles return home from captivity.

I wonder.

What would it be like to have a massive stadium filled with people like that show I witnessed at Disney...but in this case the show would not be about a mythical mouse...

it would be about the glory of God's salvation?

What would it sound like when even the mountains would begin to sing?
What would it look like when even the trees would begin to clap their hands?

What kind of fireworks would be necessary to portray the glory of God's grace?

Even the great imagineers at Disney wouldn't be able to come close to that spectacle.

But, God's Spirit has placed that vision in our hearts.
That's why we have faith.

That's why we believe that men and women do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from God.

That's why we can imagine a heavenly banquet where all can have their deepest thirst quenched and their most profound hunger satisfied.

And the whole universe will sing the praise of God's grace.

We are still on the way to Jerusalem this Lenten Season.
And we will not settle for junk food.

Instead we will seek the food that satisfies the hungry heart.

We will seek the Lord's Table and the joy that overcomes every power to hurt or divide us.

Amen.