

**Isaiah 55:1-11**

**The World Is about to Turn: A Holiday Feast**

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**Northminster Presbyterian Church**

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Isaiah 55:1-11

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.

...

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.

This isn't how things are supposed to be. This isn't what we planned. This isn't what we were promised. How many times in our lives, and especially lately have we said or thought something like that? The people in California who are evacuating animals from a zoo this morning are probably saying that to themselves. The Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar being oppressed to the point of genocide by the Buddhist majority are probably saying that as they look to the Prime Minister's residence of Nobel Peace Prize Winner Aung San Suu Kyi. The supporters of Roy Moore are certainly saying it in Alabama this week.

Sometimes things don't go according to plan. Take the last Thanksgiving we hosted at my mom's house just a few years ago. The day had gone as it normally does, people arrived throughout the morning, bringing food and the kitchen was the center of life — cooking, prepping, sharing stories. The living room was for the slackers, and the dining room was where the desserts would hang out until they were needed.

The food was ready; we were all gathering in the kitchen for the prayer when the cry came out, "Sadie, NO!" All heads turned to the dining room where my sister's peekaboo or lhasapoo, Sadie, was standing in the middle of the dessert table, living out that saying — life is short; eat dessert first. It was hard to tell which she enjoyed more the pecan pie or the coconut. She did leave some for others.

Let me take you to another friends-giving here in Chicago a few years ago. My pals Larry and Vinny hadn't ever cooked a turkey before but they had it down — bird in the oven, meat thermometer inserted, all good, until the buzzer when off and they pulled the bird and started cutting it. Then they discovered the thermometer had been placed up against a bone and dinner was delayed for an hour.

Sometimes life falling short of plans is a big deal and sometimes a minor inconvenience — for those who had been in exile in Babylon for two generations and who finally got to go home due a regime change in Babylon. For 14 chapters since that first utterance of comfort — comfort ye my people — the exilic prophet has been telling the folks that going home will be a homecoming created by God for their good. And most scholars say that this chapter is the last chapter by that exilic prophet. But something is amiss. The tone is still hopeful but there are shadows in the corners of this text and so we speculate that this is the hopeful response to how things are when they first find their way back home.

Like homeowners in California this month — some return home and things seem almost normal and some return home to complete devastation. Sure the new ruler built them a new temple but the society around that temple is fractured. Those who left, those who stayed, those who return in wealth, those who return to nothing. Things haven't gone as planned.

And into the midst of it the prophet brings this little speech — a call to a feast where food has no cost, a call to mystery, where God doesn't have to explain why things are the way they are.

The prophet is reminding them that just a few months ago they had nothing. They were scrambling and now they are once again masters of their own destiny. And they didn't travel back from Babylon alone but in the company of the God who promises yet again today to never leave them.

The prophet equates God's love — the love that has been with them all along and has accompanied them home, despite all appearances to the contrary — as a feast. Why? This was a time when wealth and when generosity was not tied up in banks but in things — mostly food things. Your wealth was measured by how many bushels of wheat you produced a year, or how many goats or sheep you had. And so a feast was something those who were considered wealthy did. It was the ultimate act of hospitality, giving of one's wealth for the benefit of others.

And this is what the writer of second Isaiah wants to tell the folks: God's love is both a feast that provides all they could need and it is freely offered. The blessings of God cannot be bought. Yeah right, there is no such thing as a free lunch, right? We know that. We live in the world — what's the catch? If it's free it can't be worth much. If there is nothing I have to pay for it, it must be fairly cheap stuff. That's the other thing the prophet is battling, the idea that something free can have value.

And the prophet does come clean — there is not a cost per se but there is a reason that God is blessing the Children of Abraham and Sarah by bringing them home.

Did you hear that part about covenant? God is reminding the people of the both the Davidic covenant and the covenant with Abraham — the promise to bless a family so that they might bless the world, the promise to bless the house of David as a beacon for the world to see God's love.

And now we see why this is an advent text. The House of David will be the house into which Jesus will be born. It's not a kingly house, at least not by any appearance. But the God who says, "I will offer my wealth for you; I will give you a feast," ultimately offers everything in Jesus Christ. God come to earth surrendering power to show the power of love, surrendering strength and might to show the power of grace.

Life is a banquet, to quote Auntie Mame (in two sermons in one month). Life is a banquet Isaiah tells the people and tells us. And each day, though we may face life's challenges, there will be a feast of blessings if we will but look for them.

Sadie didn't eat all of the desserts. She left plenty for us. The turkey at three o'clock was just as good as it would have been at two. And the world is rallying to the Rohingya people, late, but rallying, and people are banding together to provide homes for one another and to care for one another in California in ways that are truly inspirational. And Doug Jones is already trying to mend relationships broken in the heated campaign in Alabama.

Plans may go asunder but God still intends life to be a banquet. But more than just life is offered by our host, for the one who sets the table is the one who has conquered death and conquered sin. And he says, "Come to the feast."

But understand something. Like Sadie at the dessert table, there are those invited to the table whom you might not expect, and it doesn't take anything away from your feasting. Like my second thanksgiving, the feast is not going to go as planned, "for your ways are not my ways." But even when things don't go as planned, you have the feast of a community to face the journey together.

God intends for us a life where there will be more than enough love, grace, hope, peace and joy. It's not there for us to hoard but so that all might have enough. And we are invited to share, not simply to take.

The people are finally home from exile, at long last, and things will not always go according to plan. Other conquerors will come and life will be hard. But life will still be a feast if we can but see it as one, to see those God places in our path as fellow guests, to see the opportunities placed before us not as something we earn or are owed but as blessings through which we are to be a blessing to the world, to see God's great plenty not as our due, but as our opportunity to be instruments of God's abundant love.

The child is almost here. The World is about to turn but the banquet goes on. Who wants to help set the table?