

IN NOMINE JESU

THE FREE MEAL

Hear again the Word of God for this twentieth Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity.

Ho! All who thirst, all of you come to waters! And he who has no money, all of you come, and buy; all of you eat, buy without money and for no price, wine and milk!"¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

In our era, there is a saying that was once popular, "there is no such thing as a free meal." The Old Testament reading for today, however, indicates that, at God's Table there is such a thing as a free meal, at least for the invited guests who are clothed in the right attire. The correct attire for a place at the unending banquet of the Lord is a white robe, washed clean by the blood of the Lamb, Jesus the Christ. His blood was the price God paid to assure those who by faith follow Jesus unto death that they have an invitation, have been called, and will recline at the Lord's Table.

Today's Old Testament Gospel stands as a clear witness that that which we have here regularly as a foretaste of the feast to come was promised centuries before this Sacramental meal became a reality for the repentant, believing and right confessing people of God. It was declared in Isaiah's inspired prophecy and is a model sermon. It holds clear Law – the sharp sword that divides the human mind and soul from sinful desires. Isaiah issues a clear call to repentance – to people not just of ancient Israel, but to people from all nations. The prophecy contains clear Gospel – the Promise of the Greater Son of King David who would be commander and leader of God's people. Law,

¹ *Isaiah 55:1.*

Repentance, Gospel is the basic model that the Word of God uses to declare sin, bring people to the point of turning from sin, and giving people God's power to turn from sin and walk in newness of life.

All of that is contained in just nine verses as we number them. God, through Isaiah, uses 114 or so Hebrew words to convey the Lord's words about sin, forgiveness and salvation. For people who like short sermons, this day's passage is one! It was so important that it was used directly in at least nine New Testament passages. But, like all short sermons, it needed to be preceded and followed immediately with more Divine words of rebuke, warning, caution, forgiveness and blessing. That is because people, even when they hear a short, easy to memorize message from God, need constant repetition. This is on account of their sinful natures. Repetition is done by God, and His preachers, in order to return people to the simple message "don't sin; if you do sin, stop, confess your sins; and believe that for Christ's sake they are forgiven!" New preachers struggle with how they might convey that simple message in more than three sermons. Experienced preachers have learned that there are more ways to communicate those simple truths than they will have years to proclaim them!

When Isaiah first declared this prophecy,

Ho! All who thirst, all of you come to waters! And he who has no money, all of you come, and buy; all of you eat, buy without money and for no price, wine and milk,"²

he had become an experienced preacher. He had suffered earthly want, deprivation, the harassment of his nation's leaders, hardships and adversities for his

clear proclamation of God's Word. All this experience pours forth in the short sermon you heard for today.

Yet that short sermon of Law, Repentance and Gospel is not all Isaiah said when God gave His Word to the faithful remnant of a fallen, sinning, and soon to be captive people. Eleven chapters, many hundreds of words, on this same theme, follow today's text. Most of them, if one divides it with what I will call "natural" text markers, words translated such as "Thus says the Lord;" "The Spirit of the Lord was upon me;" and so forth, repeat the theme of today's abbreviated message from the 55th chapter of Isaiah.

Included in that theme is that the call of the Lord to turn from sin and walk in new life is for those whom we call Gentiles. It is these, who are children of Abraham by faith, not necessarily by blood, who are declared to be those who will recline, and now are reclining, at the Lord's free feast. They are the primary congregation, one who had not yet, at the time, been assembled, when Isaiah called out to them, to you, with these words,

Ho! All who thirst, all of you come to waters! And he who has no money, all of you come, and buy; all of you eat, buy without money and for no price, wine and milk!"³

The passage begins with a word that calls forth to the hearer of biblical Hebrew that announcement of good news is to follow. It is a cry that is positive, calling the hearer to pay attention for his or her own benefit. This is not a declaration of woe,

² *Isaiah* 55:1.

³ *Isaiah* 55:1.

nor is it a revelation of prophecy which would often begin with, “behold.” God, through Isaiah calls out to invite to a free meal all who will hear and believe His promises. It begins with the promise of water – the basic necessity of life. The invitation continues with wine, to make the heart glad, and ends with milk, a food for strong bodies. From the context of this message, the Church which holds to the verbal inspiration by God of all His true prophets understands water, wine and milk to symbolize more than mere earthly gifts in a long-vanished Promised Land. These three are figurative representations of spiritual revival, recreation and nourishment. They fit in the same category as the familiar, “oh taste and see that the Lord is good...”⁴ Such texts apply to the inner, New Man, created by the Spirit of God in those who hear God’s Word of forgiveness, life and salvation, and believe it.

Three elements of the earth, water, wine and milk, liquids known in all cultures, even if the laws of the land prohibit one or the other, call out as God’s offered blessings to those whom He invites to His feast. Have you noted that God is the one who is offering His gifts to those who don’t even yet know who He is, and those who have made no request of Him for these provisions? God desires that those who do not yet know Him hear His offer and receive His invitation to recline at His feast. He makes it clear that there is nothing that they, you, may, can, will, or are expected to do to receive His blessings. That is why the prophet repeats the Lord’s call to come for these everlasting blessings, *buy without money and for no price, wine and milk!*” Then, to call

⁴ Psalm 34:8a

those who follow the ways, and worship of this world, who think they are the ones who provide their daily bread through their labors, and work to please God who is angry at their sins, Isaiah calls for repentance:

For why do all of you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfies not? All of you hear, hear Me, and all of you will eat good (things) and delight yourselves in fatness (in your) souls.⁵

God, who gives freely, wants all people, not just the Israelites of old, to behold Him as the Giver of all good gifts. He uses the Law to convict those who drive their labors on earth for things that will pass away when they die. Have you ever thought that you were doing something, anything, to make God happy with you so that He would give you forgiveness and eternal life? If so, turn from that sin, and walk in His forgiveness, receive His promises. God desires that Gentiles, you who through family lines are people of all nations, would discover the truth He is revealing. It is His will that they receive from Him good gifts, on account of His loving, providing, nurturing nature.

His call is to “hear,” to hear His Word of Promise with ears open to the Good News He is offering to all people. The word that brings out the force of this part of the passage is the call, the imploring of God, to “hear Him.” The prophet is echoing the Word which repeatedly, in a multitude of passages, calls for people to hear God, His Word of conviction, of absolution, of life. God wants so much for you, and for all people to hear, mark, learn, and digest His call, His invitation, as He continues:

⁵ *Isaiah 55:2.*

All of you incline your ear, and all of you come to Me. All of you hear and your souls will live; for I will cut for you (an) everlasting covenant of steadfast love, sure (and certain) for David.⁶

With those words, God is calling all who hear His Word to come to Him alone, for everlasting life. He promises to include them, you, in a one-sided legal agreement. He says He will literally “cut a covenant,” not ratify an existing one – which is what would have been stated if this promise and offer were only for the Israelites. In ancient days, for one to “cut a covenant,” even an unilateral one, the covenant maker would set down the terms of the deal, cut an animal in two, and the parties of the agreement would walk through the cut halves.⁷ Blood would be shed. And it was...

In this text, you will note that God has not asked the other parties of His new covenant to do anything but come, eat, drink, buy without money, and hear His Word. He is the one who “cuts the covenant,” that is, sheds the blood that will ratify that document. God is inviting all to a meal that is everlasting and free for them, because He cut the sacrifice - spilled the blood that sealed it forever. This He did when He sent the One promised in this text to rule in His Kingdom out of His death, and to lead many to everlasting blessed life:

Behold, (a) witness to the peoples I made Him, leader and commander for peoples.⁸

God’s sure and certain covenant of steadfast love and mercy for King David was to come from his bloodline. He would be the ultimate Leader and Commander for all peoples, not just Israel. He would come as one who bears testimony, public witness,

⁶ *Isaiah 55:3*

to the free meal being offered. He would command people to turn from their sins, you from yours daily, and lead them to everlasting life through forgiveness. We are living in the times which Isaiah foretold with these words to the coming Witness, Leader and Commander of peoples:

Behold, nations which You have not known You shall call, and nations that have not known You shall run to You because of YHWH Your El, and to (the) Holy One of Israel, for He has glorified You.⁹

Did you hear God's call, through His Leader and Commander, to all nations in those words? It is there. And, as we are hoping to do better today, this call went first to those who were the immediate neighbors of the faithful left in Israel when God sent His Witness, Jesus. It was He who showed that He would call those outside the Church into the Church, beginning in the very cities where His people lived. If you need a text for home-missions, this one presents itself, by showing that the Christ will come, among God's people and call peoples from all nations to Himself!

For today, following the prophet Isaiah's lead, this sermon will end with much more to be said in other days. You have heard of the spiritual gifts of God. You have heard His call to you to repent of your sins. And you have been given the means of turning, Christ Jesus our Lord, who is found here, and all places, where His Word is purely proclaimed and His Sacraments are rightly administered. That is what this Word calls out to you:

⁷ Cf. *Genesis* 15:9-18.

⁸ *Isaiah* 55:4.

⁹⁹ *Isaiah* 55:5.

*All of you seek YHWH while He may be found; all of you call Him in His nearness. Let the wicked forsake his way, and man his unrighteous thoughts, and repent to YHWH, and He will have steadfast love on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.*¹⁰

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Trinity XX (LSB One-year series)

Isaiah 55:1-9; Ephesians 5:15-21; Matthew 22:1-14

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Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

¹⁰ Isaiah 55:7.