



Everyone Who Thirsts – Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-12

The Rev. Geoff Parker to First Parish Church, Brunswick – May 1, 2011

It is good indeed to have a *good news* kind of scripture reading today, isn't it? The hard road of lent has been walked, the pain of Holy Week held up and witnessed, the miracle and overwhelming emotional roller-coaster of the empty tomb and Easter Sunday crested and passed like a wave. So here we are: in the great hereafter.

It's great to read this proclamation of Israel's reconciliation with God from the prophet Isaiah, then, imagining a very different type of messiah was on the way than Jesus, but still calling to us in this time. It is a tender exploration of the time *after* the messiah, *after* the renewal, *after*—to us, at least—an Easter Sunday that Isaiah could never have imagined, which calls us to start living into a world which has been transformed by God's joyous season of victory over the oppression and suffering that had plagued Israel. Because we read these words and think Jesus, the words require us to think about the ways in which we are joining in—or not—in the celebration scene that Isaiah sets after our Easter celebration.

Two things leap to mind: One: To the prophet, this is a party in which everyone—and everything—gets invited! The trees, the hills, all creation, *all that thirst* are welcome to come drink and take their fill at a banquet offered by God. Creation and creatures blend together in harmony. To have Jonny Rodgers [as our music guest with tuned water glasses] here with is to invite part of the chorus of nature in: the trees clap their hands, and here today, the waters themselves sing to us! To hear this music is always truly “elemental” in some way, like the first gust of wind that ever traveled over a reed and found a partner in music. It's almost magical: the water, the physics... and it helps me remember that water is truly a sacred resource from which life itself derives.

Second: The economy of this banquet is radical one. Who are my good party planner personalities? When's the next wedding reception that has no cost? What do you think? The wedding season would be over pretty fast if everyone was invited, and nothing cost... well, anything. “God's ways are not our ways,” surely, because God's ways are about the radical invitation and sharing with all. A commodities market or exchange like the one in Chicago run by God's ways would be a funny

thing, Isaiah seems to suggest: it would just be a crowd of people giving everything they had to each other, over and over.

I have been thinking about the central invitation of our reading: “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters...” from these two perspectives: of invitation, and of sharing. Some of our Earth Care team have let me browse around in their libraries to learn a little about the state of water in our world. Water is in a tenuous situation, and the amount of it available for human use is dwindling as our populations swell, and need for it increases for everything from agriculture to industry, and as global climate change reshapes areas of water scarcity. When we consider how essential it is, we come to realize that to be people who believe in the justice of “come to the waters...”, who believe in God’s ways for a redeemed creation, who believe that we can work towards this happy scene of Isaiah’s vision, have to wrestle with the realities of our world’s water.

- *Come to the waters...* water is for all: in 2000, 500 million people lived in countries that are chronically short on water. By 2050, that number is expected to swell to 4 billion people. Much of Africa still has no direct access to water supplies. People often have to carry 15 liters at a time distances of 1 to 6km.
- *Come to the waters...* water is for life: lack of water means lack of sanitation: 1.7 million people die of dirty water complications every year. Water is also essential to food, but not all food is equal: it takes 15 times as much water to produce a kilogram of beef, as it does a kilogram of wheat.
- *Come to the waters...* water is for peace: some have said that the conflicts of the future will be fought over water. Water politics are already shaping relationships between our states. ... water is also one of the historical legacies haunting Isaiah’s prophecy: conflict over the flow of the Jordan river was one trigger of Six Days War between Israel and its neighbors, and water rights are still a major issue between Israelis and Palestinians. Access to the Jordan as well as underground aquifers remain sticking points in the peace process.¹

The question for us today is: can we truly imagine the precious cost and *pricelessness* of the resources that God has laid out for us, and for all? For, we turn the tap, and there is the water... and

¹ All statistics from: Clarke, Robin and Janet King. *The Water Atlas*. New York: The New Press, 2004.

it can be so easy to get lost in how simple it seems to be. But, unless we become more aware as a culture, we will see our ways of life even in this country shifted dramatically, and the economics of water ever shifted away from God's economics. (The old joke is that, in California, water flows *uphill*... towards money. That is a pattern that could be repeated everywhere, if we are not cautious.)

We in this church are already living out this call in a number of ways: When we give to Church World Service, aided partly by our offerings here at church, we assist in the delivery of clean water to disaster areas, where drinking water is often severely depleted and contaminated. We help them in their "Water for All" campaign, helping to bring water sources and sanitation to those who have been living without them. And through them, we support the Ecumenical Water Network which advocates for water access, conservation, and protection around the globe. Here at home, our Earthcare team has been an advocate here in our own community and state. They are urging us to remember our commitment to these resources, and to our neighbors who depend on them for their livelihood, and to continue our support of our environmental regulations which have helped protect and sustain those resources.

Yet I would ask us to carry this invitation and call to all our lives even more. Can we imagine Isaiah's happy marketplace of shared resources—here—among all people? Can we move as individuals, as a community, and continue to support our global church efforts to protect the banquet, the waters, the table to which all are invited to come: drink, eat, be fulfilled? It is a radical proposition at its core. Our patterns of use and life among our own resources will have to be reshaped (resurrected?) and moved by the vision of God's offer to all.

So, Come to the waters, everyone that thirsts. Come to the Easter celebration that carries us on through this season. Refreshment, joy, a banquet, a table set for all showing that the world has been reshaped: moved by God's ways of radical giving and sharing of life, rising up and leading us in the song to which the water speaks, the hills sing, and yes, all the trees of the field clap their hands.

Amen.