

We turn this week to the prophet Isaiah. There is a great divergence in the exact authorship of the prophetic book. Some argue that chapters 40 to 55 are written primarily by a different voice, an anonymous prophetic writer who is often called 2nd Isaiah. This chapter we read today, then comes as the climactic ending to this section of Isaiah prophecy which begins with God asking the prophet to “preach” (Isaiah 40:6) and the prophet respond, “What shall I preach?” to the exiles in Babylon, devoid of hope, at the end of their rope, desperately pregnant with angst to see more clearly what God is doing in their world.

Ho: The Hebrew word is more like “Hey!” – it’s a proclamation asking for attention.

buy: the Hebrew word שָׁבַר [shabar] “to buy” specifically grain, can be more correctly translated as “acquire.” This is the time (at the end of the Exile) when money, such as coins, first begins to be used in human civilization for trade and exchange.

in rich food: the Hebrew used here is דֶּשֶׁן : [deshen] “fatness” or “abundance.” It has the connotation of not just eating, but delighting in a **feast**. Throughout the Bible a **feast** is used as a metaphor for the goodness of God’s steadfast-love [chesed: חֶסֶד], the complete joy discovered in knowing God and being known by God. For example in both Isaiah 25, 2, Micah 4, and Matthew 22 (among others).

⁶On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
 of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

⁷ And he will destroy on this mountain
 the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
 the sheet that is spread over all nations;

⁸ he will swallow up death forever.
- Isaiah 25:6-8 [the whole vision is 25:6-10]

¹Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ² **“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴ Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ ⁵ But they made light of it and went away,...”**
- Matthew 22:1-14

A **feast** was was transpired with what remained of an offering, when one was made in gratitude to God’s saving hand. A new covenant (or agreement) once made was also routinely celebrated with a **feast**. *This is the larger context of verse 3.*

Seek the Lord: It’s at this point that the poetry seems to turn to a sort of confession of sin. Inviting the “wicked” and “unrighteous” (defined Biblically as those that don’t follow the Way of God, who follow their own path) to repent (to turn around, in a new direction) and follow a new Way: returning to the Lord.

SCRIPTURES FOR SUNDAY 12.17.2017

Isaiah 55:1-13
 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

- 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.
- 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,

RAIN and the **SNOW**: it's important to remember that this is a dry, arid land (like California) where rain is both rare and quite precious. The metaphor of God's word coming like rain upon parched land would not go un-noticed.

MY WORD: the poetic vision is about the power of God's Word, by which all things were created according to the foundational story of Genesis 1. The Word is more than just a creating force, it's also one that protects, illuminates, clarifies, guides, feeds, quenches thirst, enduring without end. The Word of God is portrayed as life itself.

"¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then **GOD SAID**, "Let there be light"; and there was light." - *Genesis 1:1-3*

"The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the **WORD** of our God will stand forever."
- *Isaiah 40:8*

"Your **WORD** is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path."
- *Psalms 119:105*

"This God—his way is perfect;
the **PROMISE [WORD]** of the Lord proves true;
he is a shield for all who take refuge in him."
- *Psalms 18:30*

"[The Lord your God] humbled you by letting you hunger [during the forty years in the wilderness], then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every **WORD** that comes from the mouth of the Lord." - *Deuteronomy 8:3*

it shall accomplish: The Word of God cannot be turned, defeated or deflected. This climactic ending (of the larger section of Isaiah 40-55) answers the question asked by the prophet at the time of God's call to "preach" (Isaiah 40:6), when the prophet responded, "What shall I preach?" It's like the word proclaimed by Jesus to the woman who comes to the well, thirsty, when no one else is around in the heat of the day. "¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." - John 4:13-14 The word we are called to preach is that God will do what God says, that God does that, that such divine will, action and practice is life.

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.

Questions for the Practice of Examen & Contemplation

- What shimmers for you in these passages?
- What word, phrase or image touches your life today?
- How have you experienced the love of God as a joyous "feast"?
- How have you experienced the Word of God as trustworthy, true and accomplishing that for which it is sent?
- What Word(s) from Scripture give you life and have held you in life when you have been parched, lost or hungry?
- How does this prophecy-poem bring you hope in the season of Advent: the coming of Christ?