

“An Invitation to Abundant Life”  
Isaiah 55:1-9  
March 7, 2010 – Third Sunday in Lent  
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*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.*

On the back porch of their farm house, my grandparents have a dinner bell. It’s an old, rusty thing that clangs obnoxiously. But as a kid, I loved that bell. I loved to be the one who got to ring the bell to call the family to dinner. “Come and get it!” the bell rang out – alerting my grandfather in the barn, calling my cousins to climb down from the trees. “Grandma has supper on the table and you won’t want to miss it!” Dinner at my grandma’s house is something no one would ever miss. Home cooking doesn’t get any better than the meals at her farm house. The

vegetables were fresh from the garden, planted in the red Oklahoma soil by my grandfather's hands and harvested by family members. There was bread and pies and mashed potatoes. And, best of all, there was steak, grilled to perfection. The steak came from my grandfather's cows, raised on grass and creek water in the pastures behind the farm house. Dinner at grandma's table was a meal grown in love and care and piled upon the grandkids' plates in glorious, steaming heaps. Just thinking about dinner at my grandma's house makes my mouth water.

Our scripture from Isaiah is a scripture that makes our mouths water during the dry, thirsty season in the Lenten wilderness. Lent is a time of abstinence, of fasting, but today we hear of the good things to eat at God's table. Like the dinner bell on my grandma's back porch, Isaiah's words ring out jarringly from the other scriptures in Lent. There is hope in his words, a melody that whistles into longing ears. Isaiah is offering an invitation, a summons to hungry, wilderness people.

"You are invited" Isaiah says, "to feast at God's banquet." It is an invitation like no other. As we listen this morning for what this invitation means in our lives, let us reflect on three key points in God's invitation to abundant life: the event, the guest list, and the RSVP.

If you've been shopping for invitations lately, then you know that most invitations nowadays are "themed." Recently, I've made a few invitations to events on "evite" an website company that helps you design free invitations that are emailed to your guest list. As you begin the process to build your invitation, the first thing you have to do is select a party theme. Is your event a birthday party, a baby shower, a BBQ, a "night on the town?" One of featured party themes on the site right now is an Oscar watching party.

Once you select a theme, then the site helps you design your invitation. Colors, pictures, graphics and music are pulled together into an invitation that reflects your theme.

The theme of God's invitation to abundant life in the book of Isaiah is a feast. The images of this feast grow in our minds as we read the prophet's words. It is to be a feast of rich food, delicious dishes that delight our taste buds and fill our stomachs. Wine, milk, and bread are specifically mentioned by Isaiah who calls us to come and eat what is good, to come and feast at God's rich banquet.

Not only is God's feast full of good foods, it is also free. An all-you can eat buffet. This is why the invitation reads "abundance." The meal is life-giving, reminding us of the graciousness of the host, who freely gives us nourishment to help us grow and thrive.

So who is invited to this abundant feast? Contextually, Isaiah is writing to the exiled Israelites who were carried away from their homes to Babylon almost six hundred years before Jesus. Isaiah has had strong words for these people, but in this passage he speaks to them tenderly. The exiles are a people who are hungry for a message of hope, a message that promises an end to the empty lives they lead in exile. They are a people who are thirsty for home, a place where they can be faithful to the God who has made with them an everlasting covenant.

Although Isaiah is writing directly to the Israelites in Babylon, the guest list of God's invitation is larger than the historical exiles. The invitation is "come, everyone who thirsts."

In the Grand Canyon, where the heat is high and the humidity is low, they post signs that say "Stop! Drink water. You are thirsty whether you know it or not."<sup>1</sup> God's invitation is like a sign in the desert -- God is trying to tell us something. Whether we know it or not, many of us are thirsty.

We work so hard for the things that we think will quench our thirst, but that only leave us more dehydrated than before. We work for the promotion that promises success. We shop for

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<sup>1</sup> "Open Invitation" commentary by Kate Huey, <http://www.ucc.org/worship/samuel/march-7-2010.html>

things to fill our closets. We plan to lose ten pounds and walk every day, but at the end of the day it's not what we've dreamed. We drink from the fountains with long lines from which we come away with parched throats. We still hunger to be known and understood. We hunger to be loved. We hunger to be at peace inside our own skin.

As we reflect on the hunger in our own lives, we are reminded of our church's focus on hunger during this Lenten season. While the focus of this sermon is primarily spiritual hunger, physical hunger is an overwhelming issue for many people in our community.

A complicating factor for those who try to feed their families with limited resources is that low-cost foods are often high in calories. Processing food to make larger volumes at lower costs often involves adding components that increase fat, sodium and calories. This results in what is known as an "empty calorie food" – a food that contains few or no nutrients, but still has calories. Eating such "empty calorie" meals can lead to nutrient deficiencies and malnourishment.<sup>2</sup> That is why our efforts to collect food that is nourishing and good for people are so important.

While many of us might not know the effects of living on a diet of empty calorie food, we might be more experienced with a diet of spiritual junk food. Are the ways that you work to find fulfillment in life a ways of empty calories?

God questions us: "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" Why work for what doesn't matter?

This question is why the final part of the invitation is so important. At the bottom of the invitation, written in bold print are four letters: **RSVP**.

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<sup>2</sup>From the page "Nutrition Information" on the website *Foodlink*, [http://www.foodlinkny.org/res\\_nutrition.aspx](http://www.foodlinkny.org/res_nutrition.aspx)

RSVP means “Répondez s'il vous plaît,” or “respond if you please.” But I like to imagine that on God’s invitation, it stand for something slightly different. Instead of “respond please,” it means “reorient please.”

Reorient. It means turn around. Change your direction. Go a new way.

The Scripture says: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.” Our thoughts and ways leave us working for those things that don’t satisfy, that don’t fulfill us, that don’t quench our thirst or abate our hunger.

To RSVP for God’s feast, we have to “reorient, si vous plait” – reorient please. We must radically reorient our thoughts and our ways. Isaiah tells us to return to the Lord, to stop moving in the empty direction that we’ve been following and turn around and go a new way, a new way that leads to fulfillment . . . and life.

The invitation is open. All who are weary, reorient your lives and come home to God. All who are thirsty, turn around and come to the waters. All who hunger, “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8).

Amen.