

Pentecost 9A + August 6, 2017
Isaiah 55:1-5
Atonement Lutheran Church, Beloit, WI
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The prophet Isaiah is calling: “Ho! Everyone who thirsts!”

Who is he calling to? It could be the 800 million people, just about one in every eight on the planet, who lack access to clean and safe drinking water.

Dehydration is a dangerous condition. People can survive for up to 40 days without eating food, but only about a week without water. The average human body is 75 percent water, with blood being 92 percent water. If you don’t take in at least as much water as you lose, the heart is directly affected. When the body is dehydrated, blood becomes thicker, causing resistance to blood flow, which results in elevated blood pressure. Cardiac arrest is not far away.

For most Americans, dehydration can easily be prevented. Just drink two 8-ounce glasses of water before breakfast, lunch, and dinner. No problem. But what about the nearly 1 billion people who can’t even come close to that? Those who live in vast deserts where water sources are remote, or those where the drinking water is contaminated?

Prolonged thirst threatens a person’s physical well-being. But so does spiritual thirst—the longing for God, the deep craving that brings meaning and hope to life. I love the way Psalm 63 puts this:

O God, you are my God;
eagerly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you,
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Where is your parched place, your dry and weary land?

Is it the emptiness that persists long after of the death of a spouse, a close friend, or a child?
The emptiness that drags on for years, even though people keep telling you to “just get over it”?

Is it the physical pain to which you’ve becomes resigned, thinking this is just how the rest
of your life is going to be?

Is it the helplessness that some children feel from relentless bullying, to the point that they
almost start to believe the taunts and insults?

Is it the anxiety you feel over terrible misfortunes that come upon your loved ones, which
may haunt the rest of their lives?

Five years ago, I inhabited such a dry and weary land. It had to do with my brother, a high
school teacher in California who was nearing retirement. He was very popular among students
because he treated them as people. He was their fiercest advocate whenever any injustice came
to light. But this kept getting him into trouble with the school administration, mostly because he
perceived that poor Latino families were being denied services they needed for their children to
succeed.

Finally, my brother boiled over and sent an email to his teacher’s union representative. It
was one of those that might feel good to write, but that you should never send. In the email he
said he was so frustrated with the district that he felt as if he could “go postal and shoot up the
office.” It was a horrible choice of words, and of course he didn’t mean it literally. But his
communication was construed as a terrorist threat. He was arrested and thrown in jail, with his
bail was set at \$1 million.

I couldn’t bear knowing my brother was in prison. I prayed Psalm 69 so often that my copy
is still all wrinkly from tears: “Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.”
Sometimes I was the subject, sometimes he was. The legal situation was tangled and I felt helpless.

Months passed before his bail was reduced and he was able to get out. By that time he had lost everything— his home, his job, his professional reputation, almost all his friends, and most of what would have been a comfortable retirement package. He began to slowly rebuild his life and is at peace with all that happened. But until things finally began to turn around, it was dry and weary land for both of us.

Where is your parched place? Wherever it is, Isaiah is calling to you:

Ho! Everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that
have no money,
come, buy, and eat!

What are these waters that satisfy and cost nothing?

They are the boundless ocean of God's grace. God's grace is the forgiveness we always find in infinite measure when we come to him, no matter what we have done or left undone. It is the love of Christ that flows in us, over us, through us, and out into the world again, in an endless loop. And we don't actually have to go anywhere to find it. Isaiah says "Come," but we are already there, living in the midst of an endless supply of God's grace. What we can do is listen. "Listen," he says, "so that you may live!"

Ho, you who grieve! Let your emptiness be filled by Jesus' constant presence.

Ho, you who are in pain! In Jesus' love you will find relief, as he takes your suffering onto himself and in return gives you the strength to bear all things.

Ho! You whose sense of self-worth is wounded by others! Know that God loves you just as dearly as he loves his only begotten Son.

Ho, you who are laden with worry! See that God cares for you and for all people as tenderly as he cares for the lilies and sparrows.

Come! Satisfy your thirst not just with springs of living water, but with the luxuries of wine and milk. Satisfy your hunger with rich food, as much as you want, all at no cost.

Come, one and all, to the feast that never ends. Come to the place where five loaves and two fish feed an entire multitude. Come to the table where Christ comes to us bodily through a morsel of bread and a sip of wine, where God gives us all will ever need for our journey through this life and the one yet to come. Come to the hungry feast!

Amen.