

All Who Thirst
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The first time I ever visited another country was when I went to Guatemala in High School. And I still remember —viscerally— the overwhelming sense of culture shock in being in such an unfamiliar surrounding.

That first day in Guatemala City, a city of nearly 3 million people, and, at least in the neighborhood where we were, about every inch of the sidewalk was covered with vendors.

Packed in a crowd, and on every side, vendors calling out what they have to offer. Coming up to show you things up close, waving and whistling to get your attention.

I remember thinking that the closest thing I had ever felt to that back home was on Lansdowne Street before a Red Sox game.

Have you ever been in an environment like that, a marketplace where as you are walking through people are hawking goods, vying for your attention, calling out what they have on offer that day.

I found the experience a bit overwhelming, but mostly I thought it was kind of fun. I did some haggling, bought a few things. I actually have a stole that my friends bought me that day, at least half-joking, because I had just told them a few days before that I thought I might want to be a minister.

All in all, as retail experiences go, it was pretty innocuous.

But for a lot of us that experience has moved online. Its right there, right along the side of the screen as you scroll, or popping up in your face as you navigate the web.

Ads perfectly tailored to you, telling you, this is the thing that will make you feel better. This is the thing that will make you fit in. This is the thing that will make you look the way you always wish you looked.

And as the advertising gets more and more laser focused, I fear it is producing a situation that is not so innocuous, but actually really starting to get into our heads these warped ideas of what we need in order to be happy.

The reading from Isaiah this morning is basically God's sale's pitch.

And God is calling out. The first of word in this passage is difficult to translate, it is often rendered in English as "Hark!" or "Ho!" but those all make it sound to formal. What the word really means is "Hey!" "Listen up!"

It is the signature call of the market hawker.

So this morning's scripture really imagines what God would be saying, if God had a little stall on the sidewalk marketplace, and was calling out to passersby to invite them into the life God is offering.

So imagine here is a woman and her children selling dates and palm oil, and over here is a weaver offering beautiful cloth, walking through the crowd

showing it to anyone who will stop and look, inviting them to feel how it feels.

And here is God.

“Hey! Listen! Are you thirsty?

Come here, you who have no money,
come and buy wine and milk without cost.

Hey! Listen! Why are you spending your money
and your time on things that will never satisfy you.

Listen, listen to me, and you will eat what is good.”

So often we imagine God’s voice as this big booming thing coming from the clouds. Or maybe we hear it as the gentlest whisper that we can only find when we are laying silent at the end of the day.

Isaiah gives us a different image here. God is right in the thick of things, making a pitch alongside all the others.

And its a pretty good deal.

It's free.

This is that thing called grace. That core, and most important teaching of our protestant faith, that God's love is not something that we earn, God's forgiveness doesn't come with hoops to jump through. It is a gift. Freely given. Liberally poured. Again and again. As often as we need it.

What do you need to drink from the deep well of God's living water. You need to be thirsty.

What do you need to eat at Christ's table? You need to be hungry.

What do you need to do to be loved by God? Not a thing.

Too many of us grew up thinking that faith and religion was all about earning God's favor, doing the right things the right way to earn a reward from God.

Despite that fact that John Calvin and Martin Luther started saying this, in 1517, or the fact that the Apostle Paul was saying it in the year 50. Not to mention here that Isaiah is writing it around 500 years before Christ, we still get this idea in our head that it couldn't possibly be so simple. There must be something that we have to do to earn it, to buy it, to find it.

But what grace means is that God's love is your inheritance as a child of God. It was waiting for you when you were born.

Your salvation was bought and paid for before you took your first breath.

God's forgiveness is a renewable resource, and God will never run out of patience and grace for you, or me, or anyone else.

So the task of faith, and the purpose of religion, isn't to figure out how to earn God's love. It is figuring out what you are going to do now that you know just how ferociously God loves you.

That is the question we have here. God loves you. What does that make you want to do? How does that make you want to live? Who else needs to hear this good news?

I did a funeral in here yesterday for a woman named Susan O'Hara, who died this past week from cancer. I have never seen this sanctuary so full as it was yesterday, except maybe for Christmas and Easter.

Why was that?

They loved her, it was so clear.

They wanted to support the family, I don't doubt it.

But I also think that somewhere deep in each of us, confronting death brings a realization.

We need something we cannot buy. We need something none of us can earn.

We need to drink deep from something bigger and beyond us if we are to walk this way of life with our souls intact.

There are plenty of people in the world, and plenty of people who were in this room yesterday, who probably never wander into a church until someone dies. And yet I believe in my heart that each of their hearts, at some level, as each of ours does, thirsts for something that they have not yet quite found.

You know these people, your lives are full of them.

Whoever you are thinking of, here is something I know about them. If they are an average modern adult, with average internet and media habits, then between the time they wake up today, and the time they go to sleep, they will be exposed to about 5,000 advertisements.

“Buy this, its just what you’ve been looking for.”

“Here is the plan that will finally help you lose weight, because you are not good enough the way you are.”

“5 easy steps to financial independence.”

“Refinance now while rates are low.”

What kind of effect do you think that has on us? How does that shape our self perception? What does it teach us to value in ourselves and others?

What I love about this passage from Isaiah is that God is not up on a mountain or off in a cloud, God’s voice is right there, among all the others, competing for your attention.

God’s grace is another pop-up ad, right there beside all the rest.

Hey! Listen!

Why are you spending your money, and your life, on things that will never satisfy you.

Come, you who have no money, come to me, find abundant life.

Come, you, you are loved and worthy of love the way you are.

Come, You are forgiven for that thing, yes even that one.

Come, because that church that told you that God did not love people like you, was lying.

Come, your salvation is in order, your life is yours, how will you live as one who is loved?

Come, God's grace is sufficient, and abundant, and it is for you.

This is the good news that we know. And it is not meant to stay locked up here in this building.

It is not meant to be spoken only from this pulpit to reach whoever happens to walk through the door, or turn on the live stream.

You know people who need to hear this. It doesn't have to be about converting anyone, it doesn't even have to be about getting them to come to church. You might tell them that this is where you have found something to satisfy your soul, but it doesn't need to start there.

Just tell them the truth. Tell them the good news. They are enough. They are worthy of love. Indeed they are loved.

And the thought of having a conversation like this with a friend, or someone in your family, might turn your stomach in knots.

But remember, the world around them is already telling them a story about

who they are. And chances are that story is one in which they are not enough, not worthy, not lovable. But they could be for 3 easy payments of \$19.99.

Everyone is already hearing that every day. It's depressing. It's exhausting.

Who is going to tell them the good news?