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Squamish United Church

March 3, 2010

Readings:

Isaiah 55:1-9

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Luke 13:1-9

Free Food

All who are thirsty, come to the water.  
Are you penniless? Come anyway - buy and eat  
Eat the finest, don't fill yourself with junk  
Come be filled with what is life-giving and nourishing.  
Come you are welcomed and you owe nothing.

Isaiah offers us the heart of the gospel message. God loves us, no matter what and reaches out to us even in the worst of times. "God promises the things that we most yearn for, deep down in our hearts, the very basics of life: homecoming when we're lost or far away, a rich feast when we're hungry, flowing fresh water to satisfy our thirst, and a community of hope when we long for meaning in our lives – something greater than ourselves, in which and through which we might be a blessing to the whole world. Oh, and another thing: *there will be no cost* affixed to this wonderful feast, no price of admission, and *everyone* (even people you would never expect) will be invited to the party."<sup>1</sup>

The human condition we often find ourselves is most commonly named sin and sin is anything that cuts us off from the source of love and grace and holy welcome. Sin is found in our blaming of God and one another. It is found in our societies of racism, sexism, materialism and the list goes on.

And so the prophet Isaiah speaks comfort to us just as he spoke to the Jewish people in exile in Babylon. He reminds us of the endless love that is present. And although it is a little harder to see Jesus speaks the same holy compassion as speaks of the devoted gardener who will give another chance while he goes to great lengths to see fruit produced.

In this lenten journey we are offered hope. We are called to remember from where we came, the source of life and love. And in our hunger and thirst we are called to the table. "Come and eat, dinners ready, eat your fill."

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<sup>1</sup> Huey, Kate "Open Invitation"

Kate Huey likens this call to the street vendor who wants you to buy his carpet or the woman in the grocery store who wants you to try the new crackers and cheese. The free offer is there and the whole purpose of standing on the street or in the middle of the aisle is to change your focus. You may be walking down the street or through the store without a thought about carpets or cheese but now it is at the front of your mind. Success is found when you change course and put carpet buying or cheese buying at the top of your to-do list.

But the prophet calls us to a much deeper purpose. The change of course involves more than furnishing your home or filling your plate. God is calling for us to get out of our comfortable routine where we have lost touch with who we were created to be. We have lost touch with the holy and in doing so we have lost our deepest selves, made in the image of God. We might be hungry and thirsty and we don't even know it.

“Daniel Debevoise describes the heat of the southwestern United States, where the humidity is so low that they post signs like those in the Grand Canyon National Park that say, "Stop! Drink water. You are thirsty, whether you realize it or not." Isaiah the poet is doing the same thing, "telling us something true about ourselves at every moment of our lives,"<sup>2</sup> I heard more than one person comment on how evident it was in the Olympics that people have a spiritual need. The way people came together in community, the way they demonstrated they needed something to believe in. There is no question that we as human feel better when we join together.

But so often we separate from one another. It is easy to get wrapped up in the idea that you only should get what you earn or deserve. Most of us even have a sort of peace with that idea. It's the way things work right? We sow what we reap, we get what we deserve.

Huey shares “Recently, I heard on television that the compensation received by family members of those who died on 9/11 was based on the victims' earning potential. (She goes on to say) It made me stop and think about the grief of the widow of a minimum-wage worker in a restaurant I'd visited in the World Trade Center years ago. How do you tell her that her husband's life was worth less than that of the executive 100 floors above?

Is our value fixed by "an open market"? Have we made a home for ourselves in that market, in a way of living that is alien to who we all are, as children of God? Or, as Brueggemann puts it, are we in an exile – right where we live – where "we are bombarded by definitions of reality that are fundamentally alien to the gospel,"<sup>3</sup>

And yet we still have a decision to make, we are still capable of changing direction, of leading a new life, and remembering the core of who we are, nourishing the roots of our being that we

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<sup>2</sup> IBID

<sup>3</sup> IBID

might bear fruit. And we are welcomed to do so, we are offered the opportunity to come back to the source of what nourishes our souls.

Last week I equated the lenten practice of giving up or sacrificing something that we might come to know more of ourselves and God to the image of an athlete who trains hard and strives for a goal. Finding abundant life will take some effort to discover how then shall we live. A friend shared of a time this week when she was watching an interview with an athlete who had just won a gold medal. She said she found herself screaming at the interviewer to “shut-up” because a holy moment was being stolen. She said she could see it in his eyes, she could hear it in his inability to explain. The interviewer continued to try to describe the moment for which the athlete could find no words. Finally he voiced something to the effect “all I know is that this is what I was made to do.” He had discovered who he was created to be and lived it and there is no greater abundance.

I experienced a very unexpected Holy moment at a Hockey game the other week. Granted I am more prone to call something a holy moment than others might be, and I do love hockey, but not even I expected to find a holy moment at “Canada Hockey Place.” No I was not at the gold medal game. Rather I was at the Czech Republic/Latvia mens game. And suddenly I looked around the stadium and I realized everyone was cheering every goal, every accomplishment, every save, every check. And as I looked around the room I found myself in awe discovering this is who we were created to be. Fans of all of God’s creation, fans of one another. Supporters, cheerers of all the world.

What if we came together all the time like we came together in the last weeks? What if we cheered with the winners and cried with the broken. What if like I experienced at that game people came along side the underdog with all of their might, cheering them on to success? What if we lived out of who we were created to be? How would our world differ? How would our lives differ?

God welcomes us like that. Even when the owner of the tree is ready to chop it down God says no wait lets spend some time nourishing it and see if it will grow. God calls us to a different way of living. God calls us to stop focussing on that which does not nourish us but come to a feast of life.

You know, at first I was a little shy about admitting I was excited about the Olympics. As someone who has worked on the downtown east side, and someone who has seen the cutbacks in areas that are desperately needed I know the problems. And if we were to go back to day one and I was asked to vote I’m not sure that I would have said yes bring it on. But what I would call us to know is a justice that includes all. I know there are many here including myself who have worked hard to get to the place they are in life. I have high expectations of myself in that way and I do not believe that in striving for excellence we are going against God’s will. Kate Huey writes “I think it's easy to sound as if we're equating capitalism with "the evil empire," rather than inspiring the church to call society to ever-higher expressions of justice, or even to demand

from society the kind of course corrections that will avoid turning us into something that violates our greatest shared values.”<sup>4</sup> Perhaps some were reminded this week that we have common shared values. We as a culture have come a long way with women’s and children’s rights, racism, bigotry and stereotypes and we have a long way to go.

Lent offers us the opportunity to discover not only more of what we need and want but also discover what we already have and may even have in abundance.

Our scriptures go on to say God’s ways and thoughts differ from ours and we will find the holy welcome hard to understand and yet we know that “homesickness, hunger and thirst” are not God’s desire for us abundance is. Another minister friend of mine was in a book store and the owner of the store knowing she was a minister said “You folks got to find a way to keep this up - look at how happy people are, look how they are coming together. Isn’t that your job?” She asked. “How are you going to do it?” My friend was a bit shocked because she said it was the first time someone from outside of the church told her she had a responsibility.

In a way I think the book store owner is right. I don’t have the answer of how to do it exactly but I know that is our mission as Christians. To share God’s abundant welcome to cheer one another on even if they are in an entirely different life place than we are. That is how we are to live out the “Christian life” a life of unity, hospitality and challenge that roots the world in such a way that we are nourished with life.

How then shall we live?

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<sup>4</sup> IBID