

March 20, 2022

Texts: Isaiah 55:1-9; Romans 12: 1-2

Title: "When the Drought Gets Really Bad"

Today is the first day of spring. In fact, spring begins officially this morning at 11:33 am. As we move into spring though, there are several areas of the country that are still in a period of drought going back to last year or even beyond last year. Even here in parts of Pennsylvania as you may be able to see, we're behind on precipitation too. Drought, especially in California it seems, is an all-too-common thing in recent years.

The people of Israel knew about drought in their part of the world so they could relate when Isaiah wrote these words from the mouth of God, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!" (v1) He's not writing about physical thirst, of course. He's writing about spiritual thirst, and he gives them some clues about why their lives are spiritually dry.

Author Joseph Campbell once said about his friends, that they were living what he called "Waste Land lives...that they're baffled; they're wandering in the Waste Land without any sense of where the water is--the source that makes things green." Spiritual thirst didn't end in Isaiah's time. It's still with us today.

Isaiah says that we become spiritually thirsty, first of all, when we have misplaced values. "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?" (v2a) That's at the heart of the people's problem, writes the

prophet. They're spending their money and their time on that which, though attractive, will never ultimately satisfy. That's true of people in every generation.

In one of her books, Annie Dillard writes of the ill-fated Franklin expedition of 1845. Sir John Franklin and 138 officers and men left England on two large sailing boats to find the Northwest Passage across the Canadian Arctic to the Pacific. Each boat carried a twelve-day supply of coal for the entire voyage, which was likely to last two or three years. Instead of additional coal each ship made room for a 1,200 book library, a hand organ playing fifty tunes, china place settings for officers and men, cut-glass wine goblets, and sterling silver flatware. The expedition carried no special clothing for the Arctic, just navy uniforms.

Well, as soon as they entered the Arctic waters, the two ships became trapped in ice off King William Island. Eventually, they all died including two officers who set out pulling a large sled more than 65 miles with a heavy load. When rescuers found their bodies, they discovered that the sled was filled with silverware among other things.

They gave their lives for a sled full of forks, knives and spoons! No matter how much that sled was worth it wasn't worth their lives. But we make mistakes like that. We, who are parents can neglect our children in favor of other interests. Spouses neglect one another. We trade our health and integrity and our souls searching after that which can never really satisfy. Our misplaced values are a sign of spiritual thirst.

We also become spiritually parched when we betray our values. The Bible's way of saying this is that people become spiritually thirsty when they sin. Isaiah says, "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."

We don't use the word "wicked" much anymore or the word, "unrighteous." That doesn't mean that we no longer do wicked or unrighteous things, we just use different words to describe them, to cushion the blow perhaps. A common form of apology I hear these days is, "mistakes were made" instead of "I made the mistakes." It might help us during this Lenten season to acknowledge that our issues and shortcomings also go under the heading of "sin;" sin against our families, our neighbors, ourselves, and ultimately against our God.

So many lives have been brought back from the brink so to speak when the people were able to acknowledge these things and ask God's help in beginning again. When we're spiritually thirsty it's because of misplaced values and when we betray our values.

Finally, we become spiritually thirsty when we depend on our own resources apart from God. The resources of God are available to all of us, no matter who we are or what we've done. We just need to be open to them...and to ask.

I'm reminded again of a story I've told before about a ship that was sailing in the days before radio and GPS and it got blown of course in a hurricane on the coast of

South America. The crew began to run out of water. All around was water, but it was salt water and so one-by-one they died. The tragedy was that unknown to them, they'd travelled into the region of the mouth of the Amazon whose current goes out as far as 200 miles into the Ocean. They were surrounded by fresh water. All they had to do was drink it.

Can you relate? This condition of spiritual thirst...this condition of having what you need materially but being spiritually dry as a bone? Isaiah writes, "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare." And, I might add, you will not live in a wasteland anymore. Amen.