

Sunday November 28, 2021
 Lesson 13: Come to the Banquet
 Scripture: Isaiah 25:6-10; 55:1-3

Context:

The 2021 fall series is titled “Belong.” Each unit we have focused on a way the people of God are called to seek community and discover how God has connected us to one another. Today we end the series and the unit “The Fellowship of the Table,” an exploration of the table our Lord provides to us and how we can share life with each other in meals and hospitality. The lesson “Come to the Banquet” illustrates how God calls us to accept God’s invitation to abundant life as we begin the season of Advent.

The lesson comes from the book of Isaiah, a book of prophetic oracles found in the Old Testament. The book of Isaiah is one of the longer books of the prophets and can be divided into three different sections spanning the fall of Israel, the exile, the eventual fall of Babylon, and the impending hope to arise in the remnant and eventual rebuilding.

The scripture passage today comes in the first book of Isaiah. The preceding chapter of the lesson has the prophet seeing the vision of utter worldwide judgment to come.¹ Many scholars claim the backdrop of the oracles found in chapters 24-27, with their description of destruction and utter desolation of the earth, is the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.² While the author does not describe the complete fall of the city of Jerusalem, this piece illustrates the hope to hold onto as the city falls. The city will collapse and yet Isaiah wants the people to have hope it will arise again.

The prophet Isaiah was seeking to find a way to explain what happened and how to piece it together in what would be a difficult trauma with triggers to constantly push the people from time to time. In his worldview, the folly of human pride had to be addressed among all nations and all peoples. As human pride needed to be swept away by the epitome of pride itself, Babylon, God needed to clear out everywhere human pride flourished before God could do a new thing.³ Isaiah’s oracles explained to the Israelites one way they might understand what was happening in Jerusalem and reassure them of the future.

The passages today seek to give a beautiful hymn of what the old Jerusalem will be transfigured to look like as they are cleansed and redeemed. Both passages describe abundance and an openness to all people coming forward and receiving the gifts of God. The Lord is also active, wiping tears from eyes and there is recognition from the people of their salvation and how the Lord is always with them. There is a new chapter for the people of God and for the future of Jerusalem. They are invited to receive new life abundantly.

¹ Seitz, Christopher R. “Isaiah 1-39,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 186.

² *Ibid.*, 187.

³ *Ibid.* 189.

Application

Our scripture lesson fits perfectly with the season of Advent as we begin to prepare and await before the birth of our Lord. Often, the secular version of Christmas focuses on the enjoyment of the here and now. While not necessarily bad, the Christian faith also helps us to focus on where the true joy and hope of life comes for us. We await the day of Christmas to celebrate the birth of our Lord, the one who came to live and dwell among us. Yet as we wait, we also reflect on what it means to long for and even contemplate what hope means to us in the Christian faith as opposed to hope in other things, places, and people.

The people of Israel knew all too well what it was like to put hope in other things, places, and people. They had wanted kings and even though God warned them not to do so, they got their way and they then saw the consequences play out. There were tribal identities which warred with each other, and the kingdom split with the belief a separation would solve all their issues on both sides. What happened was the continued collapse of both kingdoms as they were made more vulnerable in being separate. We can only imagine from what we know on the corporate level what was occurring in the local community and family levels. Perhaps not much was different or perhaps there was a lot of fear and strife there as well.

In the season of Advent, we reflect on how while there are many differences from ancient Israel, especially for those of us living in an affluent North American country, the same pursuits of hope in other things, places, and people confront us. We too are tempted to place our hopes in political parties or leaders. We also believe splitting when we disagree with someone whether it is Christian denomination or community and think it will solve all our problems and make everyone happy. And we all know how in our local community and personal lives how tension and strife can wreak havoc.

In the season of Advent, we are given hope for the future and reminded of how like the city of Jerusalem being restored, we too will be restored. We are given life from God and it is meant to be lived abundantly. It does not mean we will not go through difficult seasons or find challenges. It does mean though we have the promise of God who will not forsake us.

I hope during Advent you find some ways to find life abundantly with God and those around you. I am not saying to add more to your calendar or give yourself unrealistic goals about what you can do. Instead, find the opportunities where you can give thanks to God for your life and find the practices which give life. Use an Advent calendar to find meaning. Connect with people who are refreshing and don't drain you. Practice breath or centering prayer. Find something where secular and sacred blend together like a choral concert or something outdoors where you can dwell in God's beauty. Find a way to see how to both wait for God and see the life God has given you in the here and now.

God wants us to see how the table is open for all of us and all are called to rest in God's presence. God wants to console and move us to better places than where we currently find ourselves. God wants us to see how we are loved and claimed by the God of all.

How does the world of Isaiah connect to the world of today? What are practices to connect you to God? Why do you think God wants us to rest and be calm even in

impending doom? How can you feel God at work to soothe and quench your spirit? What will you do in Advent to wait and wonder about the goodness of God?

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