

Sermon 21

St Philip and St James
Palma de Mallorca Spain
20th March 2022
Third Sunday in Lent

**Theme: An Invitation to the Heavenly
Banquet****TEXT: Isaiah 55:1-9**

Introduction

In the name of God: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. Today is the third Sunday in lent and my sermon is based on Isaiah Chapter 55: 1-9 and my theme is: **An Invitation to the Heavenly Banquet.** Chapter 55 serves as the conclusion to the second section of Isaiah that begins on chapter 40. Verses 1-9 are very rich to be preached in one sermon hence the need to divide them into small segments. A textual analysis of verses 1-9 reveals the following divisions: section 1; verses 1-2; section 2; verses 3-5; section 3; verses 6-7; and section 4; verses 8-9. Today's sermon is based on the first section that is verses 1-2 and I leave the rest of the verses for future sermons. To understand this text better, one needs to read it in the context of the Jews returning from the exile. They did not have money to buy bread and basic needs of life. Despite the allowance of

Cyrus and the Persian Empire for them to return, it was not a prosperous time. The city had not been rebuilt since its destruction by the Babylonians fifty years earlier, social and economic structures were weak, and there were struggles for the most desirable land between the returnees and those who had been in the land in the meantime. Later, in the fifth century, Nehemiah would report that common farming families were having to borrow money and grain to pay their taxes, and even selling their children into debt slavery. If this in some way reflects sixth-century conditions earlier as well, then the invitation to eat and drink without paying would have been both gracious and exceedingly welcome.

Exegesis of the Text

This invitation may not sound especially appealing to well-fed Christians. Many of us, after all, have all the wine, milk and bread we need. The prophet's Israelite audience is not well fed. Her enemies and exile have exhausted and decimated her. Desolation and death have wreaked havoc on Israel. As we read this text, we need to ask three questions:

1. Who are invited?
2. What are they offered?
3. What are they told to do in order to get it?

Here, they are two types of people who are being invited, first, those who are thirsty and second, those who are broke. Therefore, the invitation is not open to

everyone but to those who are thirst and broke. Thirst is a physical craving—even stronger than the craving for food. A person cannot survive long without water. A person crossing a desert will crave for water above everything else. But hunger and thirst also serve as symbols for spiritual longings. Jesus will promise, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled” On a spiritual level, the self-satisfied and self-righteous don’t hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they believe themselves to be perfectly all right—superior to other people. Those who exalt themselves are usually people who have reason to be proud of their achievements.

Further, the Bible often uses the banquet imagery as a symbol of salvation. God, after all, says, “Come and get it!” to all whom our sins burden. To all who are hungry for eternal life, God says, “Come

and get it!” To all who thirst for Christ, the living water, God says, “Come and get it!” The words “without price” provide a clue. God is offering that which is without price—priceless—beyond price—too precious to have a price tag. Some people would protest that everything has a price tag and everyone has his or her price, but truly precious things in life are beyond price. If someone wanted to buy your child, what would you charge? How would you set the price? How much would you charge for your freedom? For your eyes? For your health? Those are priceless things. God is offering that which is priceless—too precious to have a price tag. Wine and milk serve as symbol for that which is beyond price—for that which sustains life. God is not offering just wine and milk but a place at the banquet table. What would a king charge for a place at his table? How much would you expect God to charge for a place at his table? If God were to name a price, how would you raise the money? This is an offer of pure grace. God

has something priceless to offer, but he intentionally sets a price that everyone can afford—FREE! The only requirement is that we respond to the invitation—that we “come, buy and eat!” While this verse does not say that those who fail to respond will go hungry, it implies as much. “Come, buy, and eat!” is the invitation. Don’t go hungry any longer! Yet while it cost God in Christ virtually everything, this meal costs you and me nothing. When it comes to our salvation, even the most materially wealthy people are like the materially poor people who line up outside soup kitchens and food pantries. In fact, the meal God offers in Isaiah 55 is not even available for money.

God goes on to say to Isaiah, **“why do you spend your money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which doesn’t satisfy?”** In this context, “spend your money” is a symbol for investing one’s life. “Bread” is a symbol for that which gives strength and sustains life. God asks the people why they invest in that

which gives them no strength and has no potential to sustain their lives. Why do they invest in that which pays no dividends?

Application

The offer is made, the provision is made, and everything is available – but we must still do some things. These are some of the things that we are being called to do this Lenten season:

- i. First, we must listen carefully. God promises elude those who will not both listen and listen carefully. It takes time, attention, and effort to listen carefully, and some are not willing to do this. Take this time in lent to listen carefully to God's word.
- ii. Second, we must eat what is good. We grew up in Africa where obesity was a symbol of wealth and we did not know that was a sign of illness and of eating what is not good. This requires some discernment. We must

choose what is good, and then eat that. I like this part of the world; people are very careful with what they eat physically but are we also careful with what we eat spiritually? Many just simply eat whatever spiritual meal is set before them, without taking care to see that it is good. This lent let us ask God to enlighten us with the spirit of discernment so that we discern good food from bad one.

- iii.** Third, we must let our soul delight itself in abundance. Even when we listen, even when we eat what is good, we still must let our soul delight itself in abundance. We can sit down at a great spiritual meal, but by to let our soul delight itself in abundance is a deliberate choice.

May the almighty God bless us all in our Lenten journey. Amen.