

“Can I Fix You a Drink?”

Isaiah 55:1-9

March 7, 2010

I have great respect for those who dare to lead the children’s sermon each week...because you never know what will come out of the mouth of a child during the children’s sermon. My friend, Rev. Joanne Verburg, once delivered a children’s message about hospitality. She asked the little group, “What is the first thing your parents say when someone comes to visit?” She was anticipating answers like, “Welcome!” Or, “It is so good to see you.” Or, “Won’t you come in?” What is the first thing your parents say when someone comes to visit? A little boy spoke right up. “Can I fix you a drink?”

Granted, his parents probably wanted to crawl under the pew, but he’s actually highlighting a deeply rooted biblical tradition – strangers, visitors, food, drink, bread, wine – that goes a long way back. Today, we trudge along in those ancient practices. You visit someone and before you can even unbutton your jacket and plop yourself down into the overstuffed living room sofa, your host offers you something to drink. Maybe even something to eat. It’s a ritual – and it takes your relationship to another level. Any child knows that when you share a candy bar with the new kid on the block, it is instant friendship. And, when your daughter has been dating a man and would like to bring him home for dinner, she is inviting him to a family sacrament – the table. So, when you’re offered that drink or that cake, you have to decide do I want to take this next step. And, even if you decline – no, thank you, I’m on a diet - you may have a persistent host who says, “Are you sure? How about a cup of coffee or one of these little coca-colas? I bought them just for you.” Really, I’m fine. “Not even a glass of water?”

Come on, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, says Isaiah. Have a drink. Isaiah had to be king of persistent hosthood because his people could not hear God’s invitations. Of course, you can see why. Their lives were not quite working out as they had hoped. They’ve been beaten down in battle. Humiliated and hurt. All that gave them reason to wake up each day had been ripped away...carried off to Babylon – a pagan nation with no respect for God. To add insult to injury, they understood God to be the one who put them in their predicament. It was God’s punishment that all but wiped them out. They were living broken lives, and you know what you do when your life breaks apart. You make do - watching the sun come up, gritting your teeth, doing a little work, and watching the sun go down. It was better not to dream of silly banquets and free food, because anybody with any sense could look around and see that the dream was not reality. So, it is better to forget home with its worn kitchen table and welcoming porch light. It is better to forget the familiar curve of your family’s faces, and the way the sun splashes down through the vineyards. It’s not reality.

People get stuck in reality, you know – thinking that this is it. Paul Dykstra is a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, and he writes about being a graduate student and renting a room with other students from an elderly woman of considerable means. In her dining room, standing alone in a reserved space on the buffet under the gleam of recessed accent lights stood a vase of Steuben glass. Beautiful vase. Deep center that flared out into a wide, flat rim so that when she would fill it with fresh tulips, they soon would fall lazily down the sides into a graceful swirl. She loved that vase. If you are not familiar with Steuben glass, and I was not, it is high, high end crystal. Go to the Steuben Glass website and you will find bowls selling for \$2100, wine glasses for \$160 a stem, and vases for up to \$1600. You can guess what comes next. A student was washing out the remains from the tulips in the vase when she knocked the Steuben

against the sink. A one inch triangle of glass broke from its rim, and the rest of it cracked and broke all the way down to its base. The students cried. The land lady cried. And, although she could see the broken pieces and hold them in her hands, she could not bring herself to take the next rational step and throw them away. So, what to do? She set the remains on the kitchen counter and they lay in state for weeks. She wondered if there was some way to put it all back together, but you can't repair broken crystal, it's not realistic.

You can't repair the shattered holy covenant with God – once its cracked, it is cracked, and so the Hebrews inspected each broken part of their lives, set them on a counter, and gave up. This was reality. It wasn't what they intended. It wasn't what they had dreamed of. But, that's life and yes, Isaiah talked a sweet talk, but he could not change reality. We humans are better acquainted with reality than the sweet talk of hope. When we sit at the funeral of a loved one, all of the sweet talk about heaven doesn't change what we know as the reality of death. When you lose your job, all of the sweet talk about God's plans for you does not change the reality of a missing pay check. When a friend breaks your confidence, all of the sweet talk about forgiveness does not change the reality of betrayal and heartache. The temptation either believe the sweet promises OR believe reality – as if those are your only two choices. We ignore today the same thing that the Hebrews ignored then. God keeps making the offer – over here! Have a drink. *No, thank you.* It does not occur to us that we are even thirsty. Recognizing your discontent or restlessness and knowing you thirst for God are two different things.

When it is summertime here in eastern North Carolina and the humidity is so intense that you step outside and immediately begin to sweat, you know you are thirsty. You are thirsty all the time. But, in the southwestern portions of the country where the humidity is low, you may be thirsty and not know it. Your sweat evaporates immediately and you run the risk of being dehydrated if you don't drink up every now and then. In fact, I read that in Grand Canyon National Park there are signs placed along the trails that remind you to stop and drink water. That's what they say. "Stop! Drink water. You are thirsty whether you realize it or not."

Life gives us signs if we can learn to read them. The things that wilt and wither our souls are signs to stop and drink. You are thirsty whether you know it or not. When out in traffic with a red-faced driver hugging your bumper and the calm of your morning prayer draining away, drink. When at dinner with a friend who is more interested in texting someone else than talking to you and your confidence starts to wilt, drink. When watching the news, or hearing your brother complain about the same thing for the umpteenth time, or wondering what has happened to our priorities, our ethics, our integrity – we ALL have those days – we thirst whether we know it or not. Come to the waters. You don't need to buy anything. You don't need to join a fight. You don't need to offer advice. All you need to do is stop. Come to waters.

Ummmm, no thanks. I'm not thirsty. That's not our fault. We've been trained NOT to be thirsty. Evelyn Underhill says that, instead, we've been trained to conjugate three verbs in our scattered lives: to want, to have, and to do. We know to *want* money for things we must *have*. We know what to *do* to take a side. We know to *want* to offer advice and complaints. We'll crave, fuss and clutch but to give up ourselves, to come to the waters? What in the world does that mean? Isaiah described a future that people could not even fathom...the vase is broken, in case you didn't notice. But, Isaiah was persistent – a broken vase might be the best you can do, but God's ways are not your ways, and God's thoughts are not your thoughts. Do you honestly believe that all *you* can come up is all *God* can come up with?

Isaiah's job was to remind the people that God had a stake in their lives. To the exiles their best choices probably came down to either assimilating to Babylonian culture and throwing

away the glass or spending an eternity as exiles, not at home and not accepted – just laying their lives in state. Who would have figured that God would put an end to the most extensive and powerful empire the earth had known up to that point? Who would have figured that God would use a foreigner, not even a chosen person, to free the people and send them home? Isaiah wanted to give them this unimaginable future. To spark their imaginations in faith. To promise them that God calls to them with a hope-filled future, with mountains bursting into song and trees clapping their hands. Come on, let me fix you a drink.

So, that elderly landlady kept looking at those broken pieces, and her loss kept gnawing at her and pinching her every time she walked through the kitchen. On a whim, she did something really unreasonable. She called Steuben. And, she told them that she loved the vase that that though she knew it was crazy, she wondered if they might have some suggestion as to what she might do. They were so sorry for her loss, they said, but the vase she described was no longer in production. But, what Steuben said next took her breath away. What they said was this: if she would bring the broken vase up to their store, Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live, if she would bring the vase to their store, their artists could fashion a replacement at Steuben's expense. They'd copy and replace it, no charge. Steuben would bear the high cost of what her household has broken.

This was no ordinary vase and everybody failed to consider its maker- the one whose thoughts are not your thoughts and whose ways are not your ways. Everyone had forgotten the one who sends us sign after sign that our lives have broken bits here and there but there is another way – bring the pieces to God. Come to the waters. See if God does not fill you up.

I don't know what is broken in your life. But, I know a little about the God who specializes in brokenness. I know there was a time when God came to us, walked with us, and led us by the hand in human form. We did not know how to handle such scandalous beauty. We put him on display for a few years and let him pretty up our lives. But, we did not get what he had in mind. We did not understand that he wanted to love us, and fill us, and his offer of new life scared us. So, in our haste to make decisions and our hesitance to let him put us together, we broke him and we put his pieces in a grave. But, this was no ordinary man. We did not consider his maker who would rather bear the high cost of what we had broken than abandon us for good. That is a God worthy of our love and our very lives. So, when he reaches across the table to you and says, let me fix you a drink, for the love of Christ, raise your glass.