

February 28
Third Sunday in Lent

Isaiah 55:1-9

¹Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

³Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁴See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.

⁵See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

⁶Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;

⁷let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;

let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Dear disciples of Christ Jesus.

Today we will be talking about the last of the seven habits of Jesus: Caring.

I want to use the text of the reading of the Prophet Isaiah to connect us with the meaning of this seventh habit of Jesus.

The goal of the habit of Caring is caring for others and creation with Christ's love. The true meaning and purpose of our lives is to recognize that God has put us on earth to love one another as God loves us. Because God is love, the most important lesson God wants us to learn is how to love. Mother Theresa often said that it is not so much what we do for others, but how much love is in all that we do. Why is it so important that Christians lovingly care for one another? Because Christ tells us, it is not possible to love God without loving one another. Our love of God is revealed in our capacity to love others, especially those in need of our help.¹

Isaiah wrote:

*everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.*

Beautiful words: buy milk, bread, water, without money and without price!

¹ Seven Habits of Jesus. P. 313.

These words are real miracles happening around us and on our campus when three times a week people in need come and buy without money, receiving food from God through the ministry of our Food Bank without price.

Isaiah says: “*everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.*” The question is if we are able to recognize that we are thirsty and also to see the thirst in others around us.

How thirsty are you? Isaiah declares “*everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.*” My first visit to Tampa for my interview with the call committee was in early August, it was summer, when the humidity was so intense. As soon I stepped out of the plane, I began give out sweat as result of the heat. I knew that I was thirsty because I could see my body dehydrating; literally saw all the liquid leaving it, droplets of perspiration soaking my shirt and running down my forehead. Even if I did not feel thirsty I knew I was thirsty.

In Sacramento, CA, from where I come, where humidity is low, you may be thirsty but do not even notice it. Your perspiration, your sweat, evaporates so quickly that you do not realize you are becoming dehydrated. So whether you feel thirsty or not, you drink water as often as you can. We learned that after being two times in the ER as result of dehydration.

Therefore, I programmed my iPhone with a reminder that sent me a message in different moments of the day: “Time to drink water”.

How could it be that we do not recognize our own thirst?

There are times when we are intensely aware of our needs and desires, including the things we thirst for, and other times when we do not feel the need or desire

for anything in particular, but the message of Isaiah is like a sign in a dry climate “Stop! Drink water. You are thirsty, whether you realize it or not.

Isaiah’s offer is unlike anything we know or practice. In his vision everyone who is thirsty gets water, everyone who is hungry is invited to eat, buy milk and wine without money. It is like a grocery store where everything is free.²

That is Isaiah’s description of the grace and love of God, a God that invites to receive life by grace alone.

When we think of our responsibilities as Christians, we need to remember that our primary responsibility is to share the story of Christ in words and deeds. The testimony of our faith is revealed in our concrete actions touching the world around us and reveling to the people that live around us how the love of Christ has touched us and transformed us and made us messengers of transformation.

The Testament tells us that loving one another, caring for one another in need, is something that we can not make happen on our own. Our ability to love and care for others is dependent upon the indwelling presence of Christ in our hearts.³

Jesus and his disciples model for us what it looks like when we are motivated by God’s love in our hearts. Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, comforted the sad, befriended the lonely, forgave others, and defended the poor. Jesus even modeled how to love our enemies and do good to those who want to harm us. The love of Christ Jesus in our hearts notices, listens, and cares about the needs of others.⁴

2 Feasting on the Word. P. 76

3 Seven Habits of Jesus. P. 314

4 Idem p. 315

We are called to care. Jesus extended his ministry of loving care for others through his disciples. The distinctive Christian way of caring for others lies not on what we do, but on why we do it. Christ-like care giving recognizes that we love and care because Christ Jesus first loved and cared for us. Christ Jesus' love for us is the reason why we cared for others.

As Christ-like caregivers:⁵

- We realize that we are an extension of Jesus' ministry of loving care for others.
- We are giving Christ's own attitude of humility instead of a sense of superiority.
- We are able to care for others in difficult situations, confident that Christ's presence is with us.
- We trust in Christ's presence and power to directly help those in need.

Jesus' habits of remembering, listening, praying, preparing, returning, and inviting all culminate in Jesus habit of caring. The habit of caring is dependent upon the other six habits, because collectively those six habits give us the capacity of Christ to participate in Jesus' habit of caring. Jesus modeled for us how to live a God-pleasing life of humble caregiving through our families, daily work and within the world. The loving care that we are able to share with others reveals that it is Christ's own love which animates our love for others. The love of Christ is the right motivation for all caring. The unique distinction of Christian caregiving lies not on what we do, but on why we do it.⁶

5 Op. Cit p. 318

6 Op. Cit. P. 320

Remember what I preached a week ago, we are a Christ-centered people. All what we do, we do because of Christ. Christ is the source, Christ is the reason, Christ is the goal, Christ is the way, Christ is our truth, Christ is our life. The loving care we share with others, does more than we could ever imagine because Christ has made us a channel of his own love.

The Seven Habits of Jesus does not turn us inwards, but outwards to the world to the whole of God's creation. To be a disciple of Christ means dying to our old nature of self-centeredness and rising with Christ to live a life of loving care for others.

Our answer to this love is what is moving us to return to Jesus in gratitude with our pledges to support the caring ministry of our church. Yes, our offerings and pledges are the way we are giving thanks to God for all of God's provision so that our resources can be used to care for others.

The ministry of caring, the ministry of sharing the love of God will take place thanks to your support. Your generosity is the result of the loving presence of God acting in you and moving you to care for others.

Our pledges this morning are a promise to support the caring ministry of the Church that proclaims the love of God in Word and Deed, preaching and helping, praying and serving, feeding people with the Eucharist and also with the bread that we distribute in the food bank. Teaching the Bible in Sunday School and also testifying our faith to the students of the Academy of Our Saviour. Celebrating the presence of God through our ministry of music and also providing pastoral care for the people that daily knock our doors and ask for guidance or just want to have somebody with whom to talk about their problems.

The ministry goes beyond these walls, and beyond our borders because we support our conference with prayers and money to do mission locally. We support our Synod with a percentage of our offerings to support the ministry in Florida, planting new churches and training new leaders, we support other churches through the ministry of the Synod, because every dollar that we give is also used to support our national church, the ELCA, in global ministry.

When our Bishop is helping poor churches in Haiti, we are also there because we support our Synod with your generosity. When the ELCA is helping to build a hospital in a remote part of the world or opening a shelter for children in a country in a poor shanty town in another continent, your generosity is there as well because part of what you give to our congregation is sent to the Synod and part of that is sent to the ELCA and the ELCA sends part of this to support other people around the world.

You see, our caring is not only visible here, it is all over the world. Christ's Kingdom is expanding and is proclaimed globally thanks to your generosity. Your generosity will plant the seeds of the Gospel here in our Church, in our different ministries, but also locally in our city through our ministries of outreach and justice and advocacy, like HOPE locally, and to the Synod, nationally and globally.

You see, God's love can be present all over the world because the body of Christ is a living body and is present wherever the Gospel is preached in Word and Deed.

When Christ invites us to be generous, Christ is inviting us to share his love and presence in Word and Deed all over the world. Through our congregation ministry, our Synodical ministry, our national church ministry, and, globally, through the ministry of the Lutheran World Federation.

That is why dear brothers and sisters we are invited to reveal Christ's love to the nations of these different levels of church presence. Today we celebrate the blessing to be part of the body of Christ sharing our blessings in gratitude for all the blessings that we have received. There is a universal thirst for God. Many people do not know that they are thirsty like I in my first summer in Sacramento when I could not recognize it and ended dehydrated. The same way, many people do not recognize that they suffer from dehydration of the love of God, that they are not enjoying the blessings of the presence of God transforming and enriching their lives with the love of Christ and the good news of salvation.

We are the ones invited today to care for them, to pray for them, to give to reach them locally and globally. Answering the invitation of Christ, we can stand today and give thanks and be generous. Because we received by grace life and forgiveness, let us share freely the fruits of this grace and forgiveness.

This is not the end of our reflection about the Seven Habits of Jesus, this is just the beginning of a journey of generosity, grace and joy. This is what to be baptized and to live as a disciple mean. Thanks be to God that we have these blessings. Remembering to say: I am a baptized child of God and I am thankful.

Amen.