

# Third Sunday in Lent

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Isaiah 55:1–9  
Psalm 63:1–8

1 Corinthians 10:1–13  
Luke 13:1–9

## Isaiah 55:1–9

<sup>1</sup>Ho, 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.  
<sup>2</sup>Why 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.  
<sup>3</sup>Incline 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.  
<sup>4</sup>See, I made him a witness to the peoples,  
a leader and commander for the peoples.  
<sup>5</sup>See, 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.  
<sup>6</sup>Seek the Lord while he may be found,  
call upon him while he is near;  
<sup>7</sup>let 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.  
<sup>8</sup>For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.  
<sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

### Commentary 1: Connecting the Reading with Scripture

Scholars speak of Isaiah's primary divisions as First Isaiah (chapters 1–39), Second Isaiah (chapters 40–55), and Third Isaiah (chapters 56–66). Second Isaiah is associated with the end of Babylonian control in the mid-sixth century BCE. In view of the new Persian empire's less restrictive policies, Second Isaiah expresses hope that

Judeans whose families were removed from Jerusalem more than a generation before would now return and resettle. Isaiah 55:1–9 comprises most of the final hymn of this exilic portion of Isaiah. Poetry such as this passage, calling for geographical return, served also to describe the spiritual journey of believers reuniting with their God.

Throughout Second Isaiah, water had powerfully symbolized God's provision (Isa 41:17–18; 43:20; 44:3; 48:21; 49:10). In this final chapter's opening words, God's bounty, imagined not only as water but as wine, milk, and fine food, is extended to all who will come and take. The image of Judah's land as "flowing with milk and honey" (Deut. 26:9) underlies this invitation.

Against the backdrop of the book of Lamentations, to which Second Isaiah often refers, this invitation to feast shines even more brightly. The five lament poems that comprise that little book were most likely composed and used liturgically by Jerusalemites left in the land after its destruction. In Lamentations 5:4 the people complained about the high cost of necessities that had once been free: "We must pay with money for the water we drink; the wood we get must be bought" (literally: "they bring our wood for a price"). Second Isaiah, by contrast, announces free access first to water and then, more extravagantly, to wine and milk, reutilizing several terms found in the lament, notably "water," "money," and "price." Instead of overspending for basics, as they were forced to do during Babylonian rule, the audience is invited to reinvest themselves in a land where, thanks to welcome political changes, they may once again enjoy necessities and more.

A similar passage about Woman Wisdom in Proverbs points toward this banquet's metaphorical resonance. Wisdom describes preparing a meal, setting her table, and sending her servant girls to fetch the ignorant, saying, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight" (Prov. 9:5–6). Like Woman Wisdom, the prophet beckons toward a new possibility: in a fertile homeland, the choice to rebuild Judean life before God. The bold exhortation embedded in verse 1's thrice-repeated imperative "come . . . come . . . come" is to choose well. Come to the water; come to the banquet; come buy without money. Do not settle for costly things that provide little; take only what is good. This applies to water and food in a land of their own, but as the passage unfolds from one metaphor to another, we

quickly see that it applies to more: to the decision, by rebuilding Jerusalem, to renew Judah's national covenant with God.

A new image emerges in verses 3–4: Israel as the collective heir of God's promise to David. Second Isaiah's early chapters portrayed God identifying Israel as "my servant" (42:1, 19; 44:21; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3, 6), "my chosen" (42:1; 45:4), and even "my servant whom I have chosen" (43:10). These two designations had only been used before in Scripture in relation to King David. They appear most strikingly in Psalm 89:3 (see also vv. 19–20), in which the king reminds God: "You said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David.'" According to royal understanding reflected in the psalm, the king's faithfulness to God's rule would guarantee his descendants' reign in a safe Jerusalem. Confidence in this relationship had been overturned by Babylon's destruction of both the city and the kingship. But here in Isaiah 55:3–4, the prophet nominates the collective "chosen servant" Israel as David's new heir.

Further language from Psalm 89 confirms this allusion. In the last several verses of the celebrative section of the psalm, God's support of David is described as steadfast love and faithfulness (Ps. 89:33). Yet the psalm takes an unexpected turn in verse 38, where an evident addition reflecting upon Jerusalem's destruction upends everything that was avowed before. Verse 49 asks, "Where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?"

Second Isaiah now responds to this raw question. Remembering both God's covenant with David and the breaking of that covenant first by Judah's leaders and then by God, the prophet confers these graces of steadfast love and faithfulness on all who stand as God's chosen servants, saying "I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure [or faithful] love for David" (Isa. 55:3). This covenant is bestowed no longer on the king alone. The promise will pass no longer to David's descendants (who were, in fact, accused of having led Jerusalem to destruction), but rather to the people as a whole, living as a restored nation under Persian rule. Continuity with Judah's royal past

is thus reaffirmed in a form acceptable to both disaffected citizens and Persian rulers. (For other exilic expressions of God's "everlasting covenant," see Isa. 61:8; Jer. 32:40; 50:5; Ezek. 16:60; 37:26; Ps. 105:10.)

A third image of promise emerges in verse 5: "You shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you." Second Isaiah has already characterized Israel as God's "covenant to the people" (42:6) and "light to the nations" (49:6). Later portions of Isaiah will likewise express hope that "nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn" (60:3). This theme coheres with the well-known "swords into plowshares" imagery in Isaiah 2:2–4, in which the nations stream toward Zion to be taught God's ways of peace. It also stands out to Christian readers who, as citizens of Gentile nations, find ourselves included in this prophet's expansive imagination.

Verses 6–9 correlate physical return with theological repentance. In the prophets' imagination, Jerusalem's destruction signaled divine punishment for human rebellion. In the abstract, such an explanation may be morally objectionable. But historically it offered the nation order and hope, since it suggested that the catastrophe was neither random nor caused by outside forces, but instead represented a

damaged relationship that could be healed—and thus the hope that a broken nation might find divine help to survive. Second Isaiah has repeatedly mentioned Israel's sins only to affirm God's forgiveness (40:2; 43:25; 44:22). According to the prophet, it is God who extends love and help, this time as a proffered do-over for all who respond. Because God's ways are so radically different from human ways, because God's thoughts are not human thoughts, Second Isaiah suggests, they need not make intellectual sense, but can be discovered through the Godward journey the prophet recommends.

The chapter's final four verses, though standing outside the lectionary reading, conclude the passage by returning to the theme of nutrition. God's words are compared to rain and snow that bring forth grain from the ground. Strong trees in a restored habitat are imagined celebrating as the exiles return in procession to their homeland.

Isaiah 55 beckons its audience to position themselves as recipients of God's bounty, both material and spiritual: the necessities and luxuries of daily living, the grace of a renewed history and cultic relationship, a meaningful role on the world stage, and an exuberant reconnection with both past and future.

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