

March 23 2025

Isaiah 55: 1- 9

Psalms 63:1 – 8

That is quite a juxtaposition – here we are deep into the season of Lent we find a couple of readings from Isaiah and Psalms using the metaphor of hunger and thirst quite Lenten, but then we find the author , or the nation, is being overwhelmingly satiated with an abundance of food and drink. Very unLenten but lets ponder today Isaiah and Psalms and what that may say to us about shaping the mindset of the Christian disciple and church.

Being properly hungry is an unknown experience for us... unless you happen to be like that bloke that got lost in the mountains a few months ago and found after 2 weeks. . And the same with water and thirst. Walking around the local park with a plastic water bottle is about as thirsty as we are ever going to get.

Unlike many people in our world.

Which kind of makes it difficult when we want to describe the gospel as the living water that quenches thirst or the bread of life without which you would perish. Not impossible but kind of takes the edge of the metaphor when you can visit the supermarket and see 25 different loaves of bread all in plastic wrappers on the shelf. Bread of life....? Maybe.... Aisle 5 half way down on the right shelf after shelf of bottled water. Or you turn the tap on as you have done 17 times already today.... living water?.... yeah sure...

Isaiah has got a lot to teach us about this.

No portion of the Hebrew Bible has been more important for the shaping of the early church's thinking about Jesus than the part of Isaiah we know as second Isaiah. In these sixteen chapters, from chapters 40-55 we find passage after passage that helped the early Christian churches clarify their notions of who Jesus was for them and what they were to do in the light of his coming.

Second Isaiah was written against a background of deprivation and scarcity. It emerges from a context of exile in Babylon. But Isaiah

breaks into this scene of deprivation with a stunning new word. He sees the possibility that exile will finish soon. Politically what he is seeing is the fact that the Persians are arising and the Babylonians will probably have to give way. And he knows that the Persians are much more amenable to people returning to their homes and conducting their lives in a way that's got more independence, as long as they remain subservient to the Persians.

And so the new thing is proclaimed giving dramatic reality to the line that “my ways are not your ways” says the Lord. Because who amongst the exiles would have thought liberation was about to become a reality. And the captives are to learn once again that grace and possibilities are to be the mindset they are called to live with.

To live with a mindset of grace and possibilities is not compatible with living with a mindset of scarcity. Have a think about yourself – would you say you live out of a mindset of abundance or scarcity. A lot of people, and especially people who have lived through hardship such as war or economic depression, or grew up in poverty have absorbed through their pores and in the air they breathe a mentality that there is not enough of.... Not enough of anything, food, shelter, clothing, self worth, love, friendship. And what you can cobble together will be under threat and you have to defend it and if someone else gets something then that is that much less for you. My parents were definitely influenced by this... my father grew up on a farm in the Mallee where they scraped through and he was never able to experience, celebrate, enjoy what he had, even later in life. I recall the story he told me when I was just young of the time he carefully stashed away a couple of precious Easter eggs he was given one year. He saved them up, patiently waited until the day he decided he could gift himself a little morsel only to find they had all been eaten during one of the frequent mice plagues the area suffered. He did quite well for himself but even in retirement it would almost physically pain him to spend money. He said he would feel guilty, unworthy, wasteful and extravagant.

And while it may seem reasonable and even responsible to make sure you can “afford” something, that immediate, first reaction of weighing cost closes down possibilities that may be wanting to emerge.. How many times have we jumped right into weighing costs before considering the benefits and gains of

something? How many times has that closed the door to even considering that there may be other ways to achieve a worthy goal and reap the rewards there?

The flow of grace through us is largely blocked when we are living inside a worldview of scarcity, a feeling that there's just not enough: enough of God, enough of me, enough food, enough mercy to include and forgive all faults.

This can impact the church. We can so easily slip into a mindset that we are a small, struggling ageing declining congregation. Yes we have our challenges, like any church or any voluntary organisation but to allow that mentality to dominate means we are going to find it hard to recognise and celebrate the 30 people that have joined this congregation in the past 4 years or the 3 people we have commissioned into leadership positions just this morning.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the mind is apparently unable to imagine anything infinite or eternal. So it cannot imagine an infinite love, or a God whose "love is everlasting" as the Psalms continually shout. When the currency we are dealing in is the grace of God abundance is the norm.

Deep down, it's based on a fear that we don't have enough. If we assume scarcity and self-interest we create a system that is inherently competitive.

A foundational abundance within reality is clearly exemplified in all of the "multiplication" of food stories in the Gospels, examples of the be fruitful and multiply commandment. Think of the stories; Jesus turning water into wine, when feeding a crowd with a few loaves and fishes, the miraculous catch of fish, the many parables and stories of banquets and feasts like killing the fatted calf in the Prodigal Son. And there are also many examples from the Hebrew scriptures.

Now I have touched on this topic before but what I have picked up this time is that in almost every case, a person in the story and it is often the disciples, who represent our worldview of scarcity, advise Jesus against it: "But how will two fish and five loaves be enough for so many?, Jesus we have been fishing all night, resisting t

wedding, no I won't come into the party thrown for the younger son." Jesus is trying to move them from their worldview of scarcity to a worldview of abundance, but does it with great difficulty. In the end there is always much food left over, which should communicate the point: reality always has more than enough of itself to give, it is an inherent overflowing.

Now sometimes Christians can get a bit dewy eyed and kum by ya at this point and rail against materialism and capitalism and insist if we just shared a bit more all would be well. Oh we all have abundance. The solution isn't to replace scarcity with abundance. the solution to scarcity isn't abundance but *enough*. I don't need more or the latest or the most expensive... I can be content with enough. Enough is more. Enough proclaims the abundance of the gospel.