

Trinity United Methodist Church

August 2, 2020

“Come”

Rev. Greg West

Scripture: Isaiah 55:1-5 (NIV) and Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

Isaiah 55:1-5

1 “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. **2** Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. **3** Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. **4** See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples. **5** Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.”

Matthew 11:28-30

28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Sermon

We have two scriptures we’re working through today. Both begin with that beautiful invitation, “Come.” God calling to His people, “Come.” In the first passage, from Isaiah, it’s a general declaration, “Come, all you who are thirsty.” In Jesus’ words, it’s a more specific calling: “Come *to me*” as the source.

The passage in Isaiah invites humanity. Because all of us are thirsty, are we not? And if you’re not right now, give it a few minutes, and it’ll come. God is calling humanity to Himself. From the very beginning, God’s plan was that He would be God. He would have a family, a people, and He would dwell among them.

As we’re looking at two passages, one from Isaiah and one from Matthew, the Old Testament and the New Testament, one of the things I like helping people see is the

connectedness of the two testaments. When I was at Virginia Wesleyan, so often I heard from college students saying, “I like the New Testament God, because He’s nice. That Old Testament God, gosh, too much wrath and judgment and meanness. I don’t know what’s going on.” Well, that always fascinated me, because we believe that it’s the same God.

So as we open up these two texts from the Old and New Testament, I’d like to share something very quickly. This is the Old Testament. That’s a lot of scripture—36 books. And think about the timeline. Thousands of years go by in this. And so in the Old Testament, they had time to see the rise and fall of empires. Kings are lifted up, and kings are brought low, again and again. So you’ve got time to see the warnings of God that come, and He’s slow to anger, abounding in love. But if you don’t listen, then judgment does come. So in thousands of years of the Old Testament, you see that happen numerous times.

Now this is the New Testament. A lot, lot shorter—26 books. And think about the timetable of these 26 books. The Old Testament was thousands of years. The New Testament is under 100. So you don’t have the time to see all of this.

So what I always love doing is telling the college students, “Actually, I think God is more judgmental in the New Testament.” And then I say, “But all the judgement fell on Christ. It fell on Jesus.” And don’t forget, Jesus even warns the people that “not one stone will be left standing on this Temple. The time is coming where you have to listen.” And so destruction, judgment is coming, as He wept over Jerusalem. A.D. 70, the Roman army comes in and Jerusalem is razed.

So we’re connecting the Old Testament and the New Testament. It’s the same God. God is God all the way through. He’s revealed Himself to us fully in Christ, but the same God.

And so God calls to us with this invitation: “Come.” “Come, all you who are thirsty. Come to the waters. And you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” How beautiful, that a free offer of water and food is available. In the ancient world there was poverty and times of famine and thirst that we can’t really relate to, having lived in this very, very blessed country. But the idea that your monetary status or your wealth wouldn’t limit you was good news to the poor. “Come,” because it’s free. “Come and drink, come and quench your thirst.”

The challenge for humanity, though, even if they’ve heard this invitation, is sometimes we let our thirst get twisted. And sometimes we try satisfying that thirst in us with things that really won’t satisfy. And so some thirst for alcohol. I think if we sat in a small group and all told stories, we’d all know somebody whose life was wrecked because they thirsted for alcohol and they couldn’t let go of that thirst. Others thirst for

status, and so they gossip so that they can rise and others can be brought low. Some thirst for money, so they take some shortcuts, and that has a hard consequence coming to them. So we've got to be careful that our thirsts are quenched by God.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul is rebuking people. And he says, "Your God is your stomach." It took me a while to figure that one out, but what Paul was saying is, "you're led by your appetites. You haven't yielded to Christ, and you're going everywhere, and none of it is satisfying."

And so, "Come. Come to the waters." This is an echo also, a foreshadowing of Jesus, who says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for *righteousness*, for they will be filled." So God, help us if we're not hungry and thirsty for righteousness, that *that* would be our thirst: For right living, right relationship with God and our neighbors.

When Isaiah declares, "come to the waters," you can't help but think of the imagery in the Old Testament, where waters are often associated with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, again, many references. John's baptism in the water and the Spirit descending. You have Jesus encountering the woman at the well: "I'll give you water, that you'll never thirst again. *Living* water for you." And then He invites people coming out of the temple: "Come to me, all you who are thirsty." So it's an echo of this. The Holy Spirit will be poured out, and rivers of living water will come forth from your inmost being. And then John writes, "I document the Holy Spirit, who is later to come."

So this scripture here, Isaiah, is a massive book. And it's also a book that's most quoted in the New Testament. This is all about invitation. "Come." It's about listening. He says it multiple times. "Listen. Listen. Give ear. And then receive this free gift." Church, sometimes I think we slip out of understanding the grace of God and we get on a treadmill of kind of, "am I doing enough, God?" And we've got to constantly check ourselves to make sure the way we're living is, "I am loved by the Almighty God. He's proved it in Christ. Therefore, I *will* follow." Rather than, "I will follow so that I *can* be loved." You see the difference? It's not, "I'll follow so I can be loved." You're loved as you are. We are all loved as we are. He doesn't say, "get your act together and then you'll be accepted." He says, "I love you. Yeah, you're a mess. But I'm good at cleaning up. I can forgive you and wash away all your sins."

So He continues to declare this. "Listen. Listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest fare." So again, a free meal is being offered. I've been in campus ministry for a long time. I've been on college campuses, "Hey, we've got pizza," and then all of a sudden all the college students are there, right? We lured them in with free food. We all remember that from our youth group days. That's a great gift.

So I wonder if He didn't apply this. Everybody loves a gift. Everybody loves a gift. What can Trinity UMC do in addition to the many things it's already doing? Maybe it's just in your neighborhood. Maybe you have a Popsicle giveaway. Maybe there's something you do that's just a gift. And people say, "What are you doing this for?" And it's just to show God's love.

At Virginia Wesleyan, fundraisers happen all the time, and if you were with the students there, there was almost always a table where they were selling this or selling that, raising money for this. You give them a dollar and you get this person out of prison and all these other "games" to lure you in. So as one of the ministries, we used to go around with homemade cookies, and they had scriptures in them. And people would often push us away and say, "no, no, no, I don't have any money." And we'd say, "No, no, it's free." And they'd always be surprised, because they were so used to those fundraisers. And you could see just their countenance change from defensiveness to, "Really? Free? What's the deal?" Because I've not met a college student yet who doesn't like homemade cookies. They all *love* cookies.

So then Isaiah goes on, "Give ear to me. Listen, that you may live." Again, he's appealing to humanity. He's the source. Don't turn your back on the source of life. "Come to me, that you may listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David." This is certainly a prophecy of what's coming. David was the second king of Israel. He had lived before Isaiah. And David had his problems, for sure. But David was considered a man after God's own heart. So David became a type, a messianic figure. So one in the line of David was coming. So it was a prophecy of the coming Messiah, of Christ. "Everlasting covenant with you." Church, this is good news. The everlasting covenant that's made with us is that is if we turn to Him and believe in Him and receive Christ, eternal life comes, again, as a *free gift* from God. The wages of sin, or the punishment for sin, is death, but the free gift from God is eternal life. Eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Isaiah goes on and says, "See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples." Again, foreshadowing the coming of Christ. He's a witness to the peoples; he's a commander and ruler of the peoples. And then, "Surely you will summon nations you do not know, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor."

This was God's plan, that He would choose a people and they would walk with Him. And they would live by His precepts and teachings, and by that they would be a holy people, a different people, a people who loved and forgave. A people of mercy and kindness, a people of truth and righteousness. And by that nation, that people, the rest of the world would know that God of Israel is the God of all the world. He says it again

and again and again: You can be a kingdom of priests to the nations. They have priests, but in this instance, He says you can be a *kingdom* of priests to the nations. The definition of “priest” that I love, a really simple definition that I love, is this: A priest is one who goes to God for the people and goes to the people for God.

And so Revelation also says that we in Christ are a kingdom of priests. So you’re an intermediary for others. You go to God for the people and you go to the people for God. And again, Isaiah tells us that the people of Israel are to be a light to the Gentiles. And if they lived this out, the nations would come running to them. They would see that God is with those people. And it happened at times in Israel’s life. And then they turned, and they quenched their thirst on other gods. They quenched their thirst by pursuing power and status and money. And they’re all lies, because they can never satisfy. Those things, you thirst for them, but even when you get more of them, the thirst increases. It doesn’t decrease. It’s insatiable; it can’t be satisfied.

And so the invitation to come also comes from Jesus. I brought something today, and some of you may recognize this. When I carried this around the campus, people thought it was something to do with slavery. It is not. Many of you know, this is a yoke. And you heard the scripture tonight. The words of Jesus, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

This is actually a goat yoke from Amish country. Many of you recognize it; the oxen yoke is much bigger. No oxen’s going to fit in there. So this is from a poor farmer in Pennsylvania many years ago. And remember, Jesus, who is our Lord, had an adoptive father, Joseph, who was a carpenter. So I have the notion that Jesus made a few of these in His time. I’m speculating; I’m not sure. But a carpenter certainly would put one of these together, carve it out. So Jesus was very familiar with this. And just in case you don’t know how it works, one of the animals would go in here, the neck would go in here, and it would fit up around the shoulders and be right here, and the other animal would go right here, and then you would tie a rope right here, and that would attach to your plow. So that would be your horsepower, or in this case—goat power. Right? So I like to think of this as a part to an old tractor. That’s what they used to use.

So as you think about what Jesus said to the people, with His invitation: “Come. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you.” That was actually a saying in the ancient world that rabbis would use. And when they said, “take my yoke upon you,” it’s “take my teachings and follow them. Embrace them.” So “take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.” And church, let me tell you: Jesus is the most gentle. If you are hurting and broken, He comes in tenderness that you can’t imagine, and brings healing and

hope and restores. He's also humble. I mean, He says He's humble; He's the *humblest*. Amen? The King of Kings, born in a stable. He got to choose the place of His birth. A palace? No. A stable. He is the most humble.

And so He says, "take my yoke upon you and learn from me. I'm gentle and humble in heart. And you will find rest for your souls." Church, during this time of pandemic, we're in this time of multiple crises across the nation. I feel my need for rest for my soul. Not just need for sleeping, but I'm stirred up. God, I feel like I need to do something or make something happen, and I *can't*. So I draw near to Him and I get yoked with Him.

Church, I like to think that when Jesus says, "take my yoke upon you," it means that He's on one side and I get to be on the other. If you've done any farming or know anything about this, you know that a farmer would always put an older, stronger, more mature animal on one side and then the younger, not as strong animal on the other. And the strong animal would do most of the work and would keep that plow line straight. The job of the younger animal would be, just keep in step. Just keep in step. The other one's going to carry most of the weight and set the direction. You just stay close and follow.

And I think that's what Jesus is saying. "Stay close to me. Be yoked with me, and we'll have rest *even* for our souls." Indeed, His yoke is easy and His burden is light. You can analyze those words, and I feel like sometimes the path of Christ is difficult. But church, let me submit to you, the path of the world is much more difficult. If you're following the world and pursuing status and power and money and prestige and all those things, how much is enough? It's a much harder row, and it doesn't have the reward at the end. So ours is life eternal.

So as I close, church, I want you to reflect: Are you yoked with Jesus today? Have you made it clear to Him, "Jesus, I want to follow you closely? I want to keep in step with you and obey you and walk in the path you have for me?" As I close, I'm going to pray, and I invite you to search your hearts. Maybe there's somebody here or online that hasn't made that real clear, "Jesus, I need you as my savior. I want to follow you as Lord." You can do this right now. He's knocking at the door of our hearts all the time. If you open the door and invite Him to come in, He'll do it. He's already said, "Come to me."

And maybe you've been longing for Christ for a long time, but you realize, "sometimes I'm just tossing that yoke aside, and I need to recommit. And I'm going to be right there with you, Jesus." So in this time, let's draw near. The invitation is clear. **"Come. Come to me."**

Closing Prayer

Jesus, Lord of all, we call on you. You're the head of the church. You're the Good Shepherd. You're the Savior of the world. You're the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, our sin. And you're the risen Lord of the universe. Jesus, we welcome you again into our lives. Rule and reign in us, Jesus. Wherever there's resistance in us, we pray that we would yield to You, that it would be well, that we would experience Your rest for body and soul. And Jesus, we also pray that as we are yoked with You, we'd be so in tune with You and that Your work would be before us, and we'd have confidence living out the faith knowing that You are with us, closely yoked with us. And so for each one, Lord, that's participating today, we pray that You would touch each heart and glorify Your name in each life. We pray in Your righteous name, Jesus. And all God's people say, Amen.