

2026-08-30 God's Shalom – Come to the Water

I'd like to begin with a land acknowledgment prayer:

In our desire for your shalom, God, we choose to embrace all who inhabit our common home. At the same time, we are confronted with hard truths rooted in broken histories.

We acknowledge that “we are related to the earth and all its many creatures with inseparable lines of connection,” but those relationships are fragile.

We acknowledge that “we are gathering today on the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples”, the Kanza, Osage and Pawnee, among others.

For settlers and newcomers, we acknowledge that worshiping here comes with “specific responsibilities in the journey of reconciliation with the Indigenous hosts on this land.” Shalom is no small task.

We give thanks to you, Creator, and to those peoples who have stewarded this land for generations.

We are grateful for the opportunity to live, work, and worship here, and we seek to live into right relations with our Indigenous neighbors and all of creation.

We recommit ourselves to your vision, God, of shalom for our common home and for all who inhabit it. Amen.

When I was growing up on our small farm in central Illinois, in the 70's and 80's we “walked the beans” in the summertime. This usually meant each of us taking a garden hoe out to the field and walking up and down the long rows of soy beans, hoeing out the most heinous and offensive weeds – especially the ones that would really mess up the combine header. The very worst of those were the Canadian thistles. For those we had to take a spade and a bucket and dig ‘em out and then burn ‘em. We didn't know back then about the importance of thistles for the butterflies. And even if we had known, I'm not sure we could have made a convincing argument to my dad to NOT dig out those giant thistles. I don't think I've ever been as thirsty as when we were walking beans and digging out Canadian thistles. It was a parched like no other. And when we finally got back to the house my brother and I chugged gallons of water as we sat in front of the old box fan in the kitchen. Man, that cold water quenched our thirst!

Water is one of the most basic things we cannot do without, second only to air. A human can live only a few minutes without air and only a few days without clean, pure water.

The writers of this worship series want us to focus on renewing our relationship and our commitment to our Creator and to all of creation because as followers of Jesus we're called to live in shalom with God, with each other and with all of creation – our common home. Shalom. Wholeness. Completeness. Well-being for every living thing and for the earth itself.

The writers have given us two scripture texts to dwell in for these next several Sundays. The first is from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 55 and the second from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 7. For today we're just looking at verses 1 and 2 in Isaiah 55, but if we go back just one chapter to 54 for a little context, we find God comforting a metaphorical barren woman with the promise of God's perpetual covenant love and peace.

The Hebrew word is *hesed*. (Spell it and describe the guttural "h") There's no single English word that accurately translates *hesed*. Google says, (and this is accurate in my memory of how I learned it – google just gives a more concise explanation than I might have come up with) *hesed* means something like "loyal, steadfast love and active kindness within a committed relationship. *Hesed* is action-driven – more than a warm feeling; it requires doing tangible acts of service and help. In relational terms, *hesed* happens within an existing promise, a family tie or a covenant. And *hesed* is unfailing. It keeps going even when the other party may be unfaithful, undeserving or unable to repay it." It's a loaded word! And it's used throughout the Hebrew scripture to describe God's love – *hesed*.

So, on the heels of chapter 54, describing God's *hesed*, we come to chapter 55, subtitled in various translations, "An Invitation to Abundant Life", "Invitation to the feast", "The compassion of the Lord", and the NIV subtitles it "Invitation to the Thirsty".

The very first word, "Ho!" is often translated woe! Or Alas! But here it expresses wonder or astonishment, like, Hey! Or Wow! This is an invitation to ALL, to everyone who thirsts (which is ALL of us!), but in this case it's a call specifically to ANY and ALL of the Hebrew exiles in Babylon to move away from the seduction of the Babylonian culture and towards their sustenance, their life, found only in what God provides. This would mean rejecting things like the Babylonian gods – most significantly the god Marduk who, it would have been easy to see as the clear victor since they had been captured and exiled by people who worshiped Marduk and landed up living in their territory. In addition to that, Babylon was a much more developed and cosmopolitan region than where they'd come from, filled with all the modern amenities. Their captors, the Babylonians were highly educated, sophisticated, economically advanced and some of the young Hebrews, like Daniel, were given powerful positions in the Babylonian court. So, Babylon was one of the biggest, most powerful, most wealthy, most sought after places to live... unless you'd been taken there against your will. But even then, over the years, people began to adapt and adopt and acculturate and worship the many gods of the culture they lived in.

But God was calling them, inviting them, pleading with them to Come to the waters! Here, of course, God is referring to Gods-self as the source, the Living Water. God continues with the imperatives. Come! Not to the tempting bling and glitter of Babylon, but come BACK to the covenant I made with you, God said, the *hesed* I have continually offered to you. Buy! But don't buy into the rampant consumerism of the Babylonian culture. The word "buy" is used here in an ironic sense – because one doesn't need to have money or actually buy *anything* in God's world of shalom because everyone has what they need. And eat! But not the proverbial empty, processed and prepackaged food that doesn't offer any redeemable qualities. Eat and drink the God-given wine and milk, the bread that is the bread of life. With God as the provider of this feast, God is making Gods-self known as the true King because kings often established their

reign by providing a great banquet to the people for free, so God is extending the invitation to this great feast to ALL who are thirsty.

The sidebars in the Anabaptist Community Bible offer these comments on verses 1 and 2 of Isaiah 55: First a quote from Peter Riedemann, an influential early Anabaptist. “Like a spring that overflows, God’s mercy flows for all who desire it, calling them to this grace... Who had ever shown anyone such love as the ruler of all has shown, even to those who despised him?” And another comment, “In historical context, this text was directed to the Judeans in exile, but its appeal to God’s generous, life-giving offer applies to all people.” And a question to consider, “What a beautiful vision of shalom! When have you been thirsty? When have you experienced a feast of God’s presence and blessing?”

These verses are paired with verses 7-12 of Matthew chapter 7. You recall this is the end of Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” in which Jesus was teaching the crowds how to live out the life that God was calling them to. It was all about the upside-down kingdom of God and Jesus was surprising them, first with the beatitudes... blessed are the poor, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, blessed are you when you’re bullied because of your faith in me. Jesus went on to teach about being salt and light in the world, about his ways of doing things that upsets the status quo. He taught about humility and not practicing our piety on the street corners for all to see. He taught the people how to pray – we call it The Lord’s Prayer. He warned against greed and deceit. He said nobody can serve two masters, both God and wealth. He said not to worry because God will take care of us. Finally in chapter 7 he warns about judging others and taking the log out of our own eye before we try to take the speck out of someone else’s.

Jesus invites those who were listening to ask God for all of their needs. In other words, to come to the water – the source – for all that we need. But it doesn’t just come to us. Ask, he says, and it will be given to you; seek and you’ll find; knock and the door will be opened for you. And the last verse in today’s reading is what’s come to be known as the Golden Rule. Do to others what you’d like to have done to you. It’s the most simple rule ever. Treat people in ways that you yourself would like to be treated. And vice versa, don’t treat people in ways that you don’t want to be treated. It’s basic respect and thoughtfulness 101.

So, the Gospel message from Jesus here in Matthew is summing up the prophetic message from Isaiah. Ask God for what you need and it will be provided. Slake your thirst from God’s source of living water. And once you’ve done that, treat people the way you’d like to be treated.

This is God’s rather simple plan for shalom to be brought on the earth. Trust God and treat others with respect. We know, of course, that the words may be simple but living them out is much more complicated. But just imagine with me for a moment how the world might be if everyone who claims to follow Jesus could do this. Trust God and treat others in the ways you’d like to be treated. Let’s try it this week. Amen.