

God's Table is Inclusive of All Peoples

Text: Isaiah 55:1-3

Historic First Community Church, Nashville, Tennessee
MTS candidate at Vanderbilt University Divinity, Ella Clay

In the book of Isaiah we find the words of the Lord giving an invitation to those who are in need of salvation and restoration. The Israelites are at the end of their exile from the Babylonian captivity and are in need of redemption. Being acquainted with poverty the Israelites are thirsty, hungry, and destitute. The effects of having no money or material possessions inflicted undue burdens causing the Israelites to suffer shame, shunning and desolation. While scarcity and poverty was a way of life for the ancient people, they received a clarion call by God. The call was to everyone who was thirsty and hungry to come to the water. The call to come to the water denotes abundance. This abundance indicates not merely water but strength, cheerfulness, nourishment, and spiritual blessings from God. Everyone who thirsts and hungers will have the opportunity to receive all that one needs. In other words, wherever there is lack, God calls for all to come so that we may be filled. The Israelites were given an opportunity of being fully accepted by coming to a table. The same opportunity is available to us; we too, can come to a table of full acceptance.

Can you imagine being an individual that resides in a country that is rich with money and resources, yet finding oneself living in an impoverished state? This is the case for many who reside in the United States of America. Just as the Israelites experienced Babylonian captivity, numerous individuals are suffering from the bondage of America's Babylonian captivity. Many are living in bondage within the borders of the United States of America. Daily people are confronted with being thirsty, hungry, and destitute due to lack of economics, education, healthcare, and material wealth. Although many get up and go to work every day, they are still considered the working poor. They receive unfair wages and are not able to experience a life of abundance. Often they sleep in their cars at night because they are unable to afford proper housing for themselves and their children. Some are still saddled with high cost mortgages and struggle to recover from the subprime lending. Economic exploitation and social exclusion are prevalent among education, healthcare, and jobs. The systemic systems of oppressions are so deeply embedded in the fabric of society that it becomes the status quo for humanity. The system of capitalism finds it expedient to reduce humanity to a state of enslavement. Some people often serve as a scapegoat for the evils of the system. As a result, families experience shame, shunning and feel that they have been abandoned by all. Their overwhelming burdens leave them in despair, causing them to thirst and hunger for justice. Unfortunately, many individuals think they are the cause of their economic deficiency. They do not understand society's systemic institutional systems have created forces to perpetuate cycles of oppression.

Just as the Israelites were oppressed by the Babylonian system, many are marginalized among Western civilizations system of capitalism. The demonic force of American Babylonian captivity deprives many of economic justice and emotional stability. Their God-given rights to come to the water to receive abundance oftentimes are revoked by systemic structures. The text states, we all can come to the water whether we have money or not. If we are thirsty, we can come to the water. If we are hungry, we can come to the water. If we are spiritually bankrupt, we can come

to the water to receive nourishment and spiritual blessings from God. For whosoever drinks of the water that Jesus gives will never thirst. Indeed the water that Jesus gives will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

The text calls us to listen to God and eat what is good, and delight yourself in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen so that you may live and I will make an everlasting covenant to David. Could it be that we are not listening to God? Listening does not only mean to hear but to discern, perceive, and submit. Are we submitting to God's call to speak against injustices toward humanity? Or, are we compliant with institutional systems because some of us are living well?

Are we inclining our ears to God's earnest attention? This inclining means to bend or yield. As we incline our ears to God, we will bend or yield toward the well-being of humanity. By inclining our ears to God, we can hear as God calls us to assist our brothers and sisters. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand. As we listen and understand, we will see the needs of others and give nourishment that strengthens and enliven humanity. God's table is inclusive of all peoples. All humanity has the opportunity of coming to the table so that all can fair sumptuously. God desires for us to delight in spiritual and earthly blessings.

The Politics of Jesus, by Obery M. Hendricks, shares strategies Jesus used as He fought against the injustices and oppressions of others. Jesus treated people's needs as holy. As we treat our neighbors needs as holy, we strive to fulfill their needs as if we are serving God. By giving voice to the voiceless we can expose the workings of oppression. As we expose the workings of oppression, God's grace is equally distributed regardless of when or how one has come before God's throne. To call a demon by name is to call out the exploitation and oppression of others. Saving our anger for the mistreatment of others will motivate us to transform the social and political order for fair and equitable distribution of humanity. For individuals who are educationally, economically, politically, and socially deprived, the taking of blows without returning them allows us to exercise our power over abusive political systems. As Christians we don't just explain the alternative, we show it by demonstrating a new way of living in an unreserved allegiance to the Kingdom of God by bringing water and food to those who are in need.

As believers, our collective desire should be for all to fare well economically, emotionally, educationally, materially, and spiritually. The responsibilities of Christians are to be concerned for the needs of others. Jesus calls us to love the Lord God with all of our hearts, and with all of our souls, and with all of our minds, and we shall love our neighbors as we love ourselves. We should not want our sisters and brothers to be thirsty or hungry. Doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly before God and humanity should be our interest. Our faith compels us to repent of the injustices and oppressions that are inflicted upon the marginalized. Isaiah 55: 7 (NRSV) states, "Let the wicked forsake their way, and unrighteous their thoughts let them return to God, for he will abundantly pardon."

There is a great divide among class and economics in the United States. I am reminded of my field placement service. The evidence of thirst and hunger was throughout a community where I served. As I toured the community there was a sense of depression, hopelessness, and death. It appeared that the community was not aware of God's clarion call for those who were thirsty and

hungry. As I engaged a resident she shared that when her granddaughters were younger they were excited about their lives and desired to graduate from college and become successful. However, because of their economic, psychological, spiritual, social, and political thirst, they were no longer enthusiastic about their futures. They lost their hopes, goals, and dreams due to the existing disparities. I consider that the systemic systems of economics, social and political oppressions have adversely affected the girls. The institutional structures have caused them to feel ashamed, shunned, and abandoned. The grandmother spoke about death being rampant throughout the community. She felt overwhelmed by the community's environment. Nevertheless, as God displayed faithfulness to the Israelites by allowing them to come to a table of abundance, God offers restoration to this community. God offers salvation and restoration to all the oppressed. As we continue to assist in various communities, we are exemplifying God's love, care and concern for humanity. By covenanting with various communities, we are covenanting with God.

We all have parched areas in our lives. There are areas in all of us that are desirous for God's thirst-quenching power. The text is explicitly inclusive for all to partake in God's abundance. Even as God made a covenant with David and others, God's everlasting covenant is available to you and me.

Let us pray. Most gracious God, we praise you for your everlasting covenant. We thank you for helping us hear and attend to the cries of others. Let us not walk by and think that it is someone else's responsibility to respond to their thirst and hunger. Give us the wherewithal to attend to their needs. Help us to see our sisters and brothers as you see them. Give us courage and strength to fight against injustices and oppressions and allow restoration take place within our hearts, homes, and communities.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.