

Homily for People and Parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday 23rd March 2025, Lent 3

Readings: **Isaiah 55:1-9**

1Corinthians 10:1-13

Psalm 63:1-9

Luke 13:1-9

I think a good meal is greatly enhanced when it is not rushed! When there is time to savor the flavors and textures of the food, and there's time for beyond the surface conversation. There may be only one course in a good meal, but when there's more than one, we really don't want to feel rushed in our eating or conversation. For when we do rush, we may have a sense of indigestion! However, neither do we want the time between the main course and dessert to be too long, otherwise we may think there is a problem in the kitchen!

Clearly there is an art in good hospitality.

A time of worship with others can be like a good meal shared with friends. It can be an experience greatly enhanced, and made more satisfying, when it is not rushed, and it is thoughtfully prepared. Sometimes in our worship – both Morning Prayer and Communion – the readings come so thick and fast that there is no time for digestion, or reflection. Indeed, four readings, one after another – Old Testament, Psalm, New Testament and Gospel – can feel a bit overwhelming. We just want to sit with one – savor one – unpack one, and we can feel relief and gratitude when the person preaching does this. That said, it can be unsettling when the preacher has chosen to focus on the reading that did not move, intrigue, or inspire us! When this happens, we need to do some work after we get home!

It is particularly hard to rush when a writer has used words and phrases that are not meant to be taken literally. What did they mean when they used that word, or phrase, we ask ourselves? How could God be speaking to me through this writing we wonder? And, what relevance and value could it have to the society I am part of now?

The reading from Isaiah this week is such a reading. It warmly offers invitation through the phrases: *'come to the waters'; 'come... and eat'; 'come buy wine'; 'come to me'*. But some of the phrasing deliberately jars, and quite literally makes no sense. How can we *'buy wine and milk'* if we have no money? That's not the way economies work – both in the ancient world of Isaiah, and the modern world we are part of. Why would bread – or some other food - not satisfy our hunger? And, what are the things we are spending our money on that do not bring satisfaction?

Baffled, or bemused, we find a key or clue, in verses eight and nine of the reading. In these, Isaiah clearly claims that God is speaking through his writing to the people of his time. And, in faith, we have the audacity to believe that God continues to speak through these same

words to us and to the people of our time. Bearing this in mind let's listen to the verses again:

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways says the Lord. For as the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

It is helpful to be reminded that the thoughts and ways of God are different to ours, and that the thoughts and ways of God are higher, or greater, than ours. Very often we are tempted to think that God thinks like we do, speaks the same language, and desires for us what we want...

So... what do we think brings satisfaction in life, because there's a fair chance that it is in these things that we'll invest our time and energy. Seeking to achieve or gain these things will give our lives focus and purpose for a season, or for a lifetime. So, I ask again, what do we think brings satisfaction in life?

As a child of the culture we live in I'm going to offer some ideas and some these you may agree with, and with some you may disagree. You may even think that I've missed out some important things but let me at least prime the pump for our reflection.

There is a widely held belief in our society that the more money we have the happier we will be. 'Wouldn't it be nice?' the Lotto adverts asks, while offering images of perfect looking people spending money on themselves, or on their children. There is a connected belief that the more expensive the house we live in, or the newer the car we drive, the more satisfied, and happy we will be.

We might also fall into the trap of thinking that physical appearance and beauty is the main game, so we keep buying clothes until our wardrobes are overflowing... but, many feel insecure about their appearance because they don't look like models or movie stars. We might think that the more food we eat, or the more sex we have, or the more sport we watch... the happier and more satisfied we'll be. Or, we think we will be content if we're doing better than those around us; & are winning in the competition for power & influence.

Most of us would recognise that each of these things has a shadow side, and when they dominate our aspirations our lives can get out balance and become toxic. When we value money – and the things that money can buy - above loving relationships, we can eventually find ourselves isolated, lonely, and deeply unhappy.

Almost as an antidote to these things God says through the prophet Isaiah, *'Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good...'* *'Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.'*

There are two words in these verses that stand out, and the first is 'come'. We are invited into relationship with God, it is not forced. But in accepting the invitation, in acknowledging that we are not enough by ourselves, there is the possibility of a new life that is not driven by selfishness. In acknowledging our need for God by responding to invitation, there is a subtle shift that suggests our individual desires are not the main game, and that we are each called to deep relationship with Creator and created.

The second word is 'listen' - because in this we are invited to be life-long learners. There is a much-needed humility here, for in real listening we acknowledge that we do not know everything and always have something to learn. Indeed, I think we need to go on learning in every season of life as we negotiate the moral and ethical challenges of an increasingly complex world.

It is no accident that Jesus is remembered saying in John's Gospel, 'I am the bread of life'. Somehow in the life of Jesus we can recognise someone who was deeply grounded in God. Someone whose aspiration was to do what God wanted.... Someone who knew love, shared love, and called others to do the same. But, we believe that Jesus is much more than a role model for he became the Christ. In this he is past, present, and future: friend and life-giver; teacher and healer; Lord and Christ.

Would you please join with me now as we close in prayer:

Gracious God, we give thanks for your gifts of life and love, and for each breath and heart beat that makes our lives possible. Through your Spirit help us to 'come' to you more, and 'listen' to you better, that we may live generous and loving lives, following in the footsteps of your Son Jesus, in whose name we pray. **Amen.**