

## November 13

Draw from the Well

Isaiah 12

The people of Israel had been going through some difficult times. They were being oppressed by their neighbors. In a few short years the northern kingdom would be overrun and the southern kingdom would be little more than a vassal state. In the first eleven chapters of Isaiah we have been hearing promises concerning a better time in their future. Many of the great messianic prophecies are contained in these chapters such as: a virgin shall conceive and bear a son who shall be called Emmanuel, he will be the Prince of Peace, of his rule there will be no end, a stump shall come forth from the root of Jesse, and the lion shall lay down with a lamb. These are just some of the great words of hope that Isaiah shared. He wanted the people to understand that God was with them and that they had a future. This little chapter of six verses is meant as a bridge to the next great set of prophetic pronouncements by Isaiah. These are mostly condemnation of foreign nations, the oppressors. What we read today is a call to give thanks. They are to give thanks for how God had been with them during their present struggles and, even more, to give thanks always to God who will continue to do wondrous things among them. The first three verses are a challenge to the individual to give thanks, and the last verses are a reminder that all of Zion is to give thanks. Between these challenges to individual and corporate thanks are these words: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

I have been thinking about how important wells are to the story of our faith. Abraham, as part of his accepting the promise of God, digs wells as a sign of ownership when he gets to Palestine. Jacob sees Rachel at a well. He also, upon returning to his homeland, digs at least one well. Moses, after fleeing from Egypt because he killed a man, is sitting by a well when the daughters of Midian come to water their flocks. Other shepherds attempt to drive them away. Moses intervenes and is welcomed into the house and finds a wife. Jesus encounters the woman at that same well of Jacob. Wells are a big deal in a desert land. They are often deep, took a long time to dig and are often the difference between life and death. With all of those secondary meanings

surrounding the use of the word “well” I believe that Isaiah was getting at the following ideas when he talked about drawing water from the wells of salvation.

Think about a time you were hot and thirsty. You poured yourself a glass of cold water. Remember how good it tasted? Remember how, at that moment, you felt as if there was nothing better in the entire world? That sense of contentment and fulfillment is behind the words of Isaiah when he says, “With joy we will draw water.”

The hot thirsty feeling is our time of troubles. We are facing fear, doubt, and uncertainty, to mention a few of our struggles. We are wandering in the desert feeling as if our life and hope are being sucked out of us. We all know these times. Then something reminds us in a real and tangible way that God is with us. It is like that person in the desert finally seeing the oasis or a well signifying hope and life. With joy, they realize that they won't die. With joy and anticipation they run to the well and with great expectancy they draw forth the life-giving water. This happens in our lives. When we are going through those difficult times and are reminded that God is with us, it is with joy and anticipation we receive this news. We celebrate what God is doing in our lives and particularly in this situation. Isaiah had been sharing the Messianic prophecies with a people fearing the future and the loss of their kingdom and king. He wanted to replace their dread, at all the troubles coming to them from hostile neighbors, with hope. He wanted them to know the joy that God is our salvation; that a shoot will come forth from the stump of Jesse; that David's line will rule forever. He wanted them to know that we will get through these times. The messiah will come.

Whatever desert place you might find yourself in, at times in your life, remember that you are not alone. God is with you, there is hope. Look around for ways God is showing God's presence to you this day. It might be in the supporting word of a friend or a word of scripture, but it is there. That presence is the well of water giving life to you in this desert time. With joy reach for it knowing there is a life-giving way forward.

With joy, we hear God offers life but we must draw the water from the well of salvation. What does that mean? It means we have a part to play. For the Israelites they were to be faithful and look to God instead of going after the gods of their oppressors. It

meant keeping hope even during difficult times. It meant trusting in God's love even when it felt like God was angry at them. And these words of challenge to faithfulness, and hope and trust, when things are challenging, are what we need to do to also draw forth the water of salvation.

We need to hear that Isaiah was not saying our problems will be solved. Just because we turn to God doesn't mean that they will go away. But it says we can find life giving moments in the desert. We can find those moments of joy. We can see the ways we are encouraged and supported and this helps us to know we will find a way through this darkness.

I think of people who have had to struggle through a terminal illness. Often, in the beginning their words are all about remission and cure. For them every good test or new procedure is their moment of hope. Yet, as the illness continues they often wander in the desert of anger and disappointment. "Why me?" is their constant complaint. But this often passes and as the inevitability of the illness becomes apparent. I begin to see them moving towards an appreciation of all that life still offers them. They begin to celebrate the little moments of life, the time with the grandchildren, or the walk on the beach. They begin to talk about how God has been with them. Their salvation now is not focused on cure but on eternal life and they trust more and more in it. Many, by the end, are drinking deep of that water of salvation.

Ultimately, we are called to give thanks for God's presence in our lives, for the ways God brings life to us even when we are in the desert. We are not to take it for granted. We are to sing praises to the Lord for God has done glorious things.

Have you praised God for the glorious things God is doing in your life right now? I know that for some of you today is a challenge and tomorrow is filled with fear of the unknown. We are still to sing praises. This is part of how we draw forth the water. This is how we find joy.

When I talk about this I am reminded of one of the first people I was pastor to who was dying of a long and painful illness. Her days were often an agony where every movement was a challenge. I would go to support her and often come away feeling I

was the one who was lifted up. She found little moments of joy in each day of her life and it was these that she focused on. Her bed looked out at a tree where her husband had put up many different types of bird feeders. Often she would talk about what feathered friends had visited that day. One time I asked her about her focus on the birds. I had been told in my counseling class that sometimes people talk about incidental things to deflect the counselor from probing the important questions. Her response surprised me. She said, "I realize that I have a choice as to what to focus on each day I have left. I can focus on my illness and my pain or I can focus on God and life. The birds are my reminder that the God of creation is with me. I choose life!"

Are you thirsty? Does life feel like you are wandering in a desert? Do you feel as if life as you know it and enjoy it is slipping away? God understands. God is with you wanting you to feel life and joy. Draw from that well, find refreshment in the awareness that you are not going through this alone, and give thanks.