

Third Sunday in Lent

HAUTE (AND HOLY) CUISINE

Isaiah 55:1-8

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Analysis by Marcus Felde

*Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!*

*Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.*

*2Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.*

*3Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.*

*4See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.*

*5See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.*

*6Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;*

*7let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,*

*and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
8For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
9For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

DIAGNOSIS: The Foodie Follies

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Eating Junk Food*

Skimming the surface of this prophecy, we come upon a powerful accusation: people waste their money on food that does not satisfy. We pay high prices for stuff that is just no good. That is stupid in two ways: what we buy won't do us any good; and then we'll be out of money, so we won't be able to buy what we actually do need. Yet we keep on doing it. This is not a mistake we made once or twice. It is our habit. (The accusatory query, "Why do you spend money for that which is not bread?," is in the customary tense.) Isaiah was speaking to people of a different place and time, but if the shoe fits, we had better wear it. Do we do the same?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Foolish Craving*

Digging a little deeper diagnostically into a text which says the same thing over and over, we hear it said that our thoughts are as wrong as the actions they lead to. Our thoughts are not divine thoughts. Our delighting in the wrong things, working for the wrong things, eating the wrong things-all these come from within, from having the wrong God in our hearts, from having turned away from the true God. Our thoughts are askew, they have the wrong object, we have the wrong god as our god.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Starving towards*

Death

Plumbing the depth of this text, which is again not hard because it is so transparent, we see that our condition, if not corrected, is terminal. There will come a time when the Lord will not be found any longer, we are warned ("Seek the Lord while he may be found"). God will not always be near. We ought to know what will happen to us if we do not consume what we need to sustain us: We clearly need pardon. Without pardon and without mercy, we will not have life.

PROGNOSIS: The Best

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *"You Spread a Table before Me in the Presence of My Enemies"*

On the other hand, the promise threads throughout this text, from top to bottom, that God is merciful and will save his people by giving them everything they need to live, despite their sin, and will do so without asking for a price. God will make an everlasting covenant with us, will give us a sign as clear as David that he is acting to save us. We have this David in Jesus Christ, who perfects and completes that earlier covenant by being an eternal king of righteousness, enthroned upon the cross to draw all people to himself (John 12:32, Isaiah 55:5).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Advanced Solution) : *Having an Appetite for God*

Whoever turns away from their expensive, bad diet to receive the rich, free diet of God's lavish mercy, has what God promises here-the life that he wants to satisfy us. Turning away from wickedness, we turn towards God. This turning takes place in our hearts by the power of God's Spirit. Our patterns of consumption change because, enlightened by the good offer from God, we recognize what is really good for us. We "listen, so that [we] may live" (v. 3).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *God Glorifies Himself in Us (v. 5)*

Having been glorified by what God has done in us (Isaiah 55:6), we become a beacon to the world. Other people need the same thing we do; they wake up and smell the coffee coming from our direction, except it's not coffee (which is probably not good for you), but anyway, nations will come running when they hear we have a secret to share. Not that we ourselves are the secret, but God is revealed to the world by what he does in us—abundantly pardons (v. 7) in Jesus Christ.

Concluding homiletical advice: Let the controlling metaphorical nexus be gustatory: the value of good food; peril of bad diet, scurvy, etc.; food gives life; food as gift; etc. Theologically, make sure the lesson is not merely moralistic (“Save yourself by “eating” right”) or thinly therapeutic (“Save yourself by uncovering why you always make bad “food” choices, and stop doing that!”) but essentially salvific (“God gives for no price the “food” which gives life”). That way, people’s response to the sermon can be “Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endures forever” instead of “I’ll try harder this week.”