
Once more, we are in that space where we are wanting more rain – there was a short span in October where some folks made the mistake of saying we were getting too much rain and others responded, “Bite your tongue!” Rain has been way too elusive for California over the past several years and tragically people’s wells are drying up in rural areas. As one member stated after her water was cut off a couple days due to plumbing issues, we can live without most things except water. Water is at the heart of human existence, whether it be at home, in the growing of food, or on planets as yet undiscovered. We must have water and when we don’t have it, we thirst for it even more – have you ever noticed how thirsty you can get when water isn’t readily available? When we are lacking this essential resource, the search for water becomes all-consuming. Just my talking about taking a sip of cool, clear refreshing water can stimulate your brain to want it. It is one of the reasons engineers of practicality advise digging the well before you get thirsty.

The idea of more, not just with basic essentials, but in a wide variety of circumstances is a powerful and motivating force in our lives. Consider how many times you have actually been completely content with what you have and not felt, somewhere deep inside, a longing for more? How often have you felt fully at ease in the present moment, with no further urges to add to that moment? They are probably few and far between. We are taught early on the importance of seeking more, of striving for the more which lies hidden beneath the visible. We hear phrases like, “There is more to life than meets the eye... There is more in our past than history can tell... There is more to our relationships than we are aware...” and so on. We believe that no matter how full our present may be, beyond the now, there is more. If any of this sounds familiar, then you are akin to the audience for our text from Isaiah. Dr. Rev. Will Willimon asserts that the people to whom these words are written are those who seeking more, those who may go to church out of an untapped need or a fervently burning hope for more. The words also speak to those who have stopped coming to worship because they have given up hoping for anything else in life. They are the afflicted, the brokenhearted, the captives, the mourners, and all those who feel something is lacking in their lives, who lack peace in their lives. That sense of lacking can produce negative actions. A story was told in
the Ft. Worth Star Telegram several years ago out of Genoa, TX where a small group of firefighters had been accused of deliberately setting more than 40 destructive fires. When caught, they stated, “We had nothing to do. We just wanted to get the red lights flashing and the bells clanging.” Something was lacking there.

Isaiah says that God has intervened on behalf of those who are thirsting for more, that God has anointed one to take action. When God intervenes, the lacking in one’s life is transformed into a realization of peace and fulfillment. This action is nothing less than radical liberation – a release of prisoners, reparation for ruined cities, justice for victims. The prophet Isaiah uses poetry that translates into political repercussions, to governments being tossed on their heads and shaken by their toenails until garlands are hung by the rafters rather than ashes spread on gravesites. It is called “jubilee” or the “year of the Lord.” Jubilee is that time when all those things that the established political order wants us to ignore, invites us to turn a blind eye to, are flipped upside down and set right. Jubilee time is a concrete, material, and economic act which results in such things as homeless encampments along the river and nearby parks being transformed into great festivals. Jubilee time results in children being protected from school shootings, elderly are treasured and provided for, the sick are healed, and the accused are given fair and equitable trials. The year of the Lord is when God’s people begin to recognize a different and larger vision of the future on the horizon where the signals of neighborliness are endlessly lived out. When we are exposed to such speech from the prophet Isaiah, we are called beyond the world of predictability into another world of thought and risk and giving. In that world, God intervenes to subvert our tamed expectations and to evoke a new and fresh faith. It is dangerous hope that leads to daring resistance. Being passive and turning a blind eye is no longer possible for those who hear tell of more... who hear the angels sing of good will and peace to not just some, but to all people. A story is told about a man in the very poor Appalachian region who had been out of work for months. He caught his children on the back porch thumbing through the Target Christmas catalogue, wishing. He flew into a rage, spanked them all, tore the catalogue to bits, and sat down in his yard and wept. In their own ways, both kids and father just wanted more. Then there was a group of Soviet Christian dissidents who were once asked by a
reporter, “Well, what do you want? Why aren’t Soviet Christians satisfied with the new freedoms which Gorbachev has given you? Why won’t you soften your criticism and support for the government?” The Christian dissident responded via a translator, “He says they are not satisfied. He says they want more.” Apparently, anything less is just a delusion and a trap... and wanting more can be prophetic.

For those of us who gather to hear Isaiah’s words, worship is at its best, a summons towards more. But not just any old more as Willimon points out. Our vague, frequently reoccurring, sense of need, which we so often try to meet by buying more, by accumulating and getting more, particularly at this time of year, is changed to reveal a groping and a longing after God and God’s will for us. Our desire for more is given a name in this text – it is called “the year of the Lord’s favor.” The year in which God gets what God wants, when earth more closely resembles that which God first had in mind when God began to form something out of nothing, to create less into more. Friends, the Spirit of the Lord is upon us to proclaim good tidings to the afflicted, the opening of the prisons to those who are bound, to give them a garland instead of ashes. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to share with you, dear friends of Redding, California, that a new vision is coming closer into view and is just around the corner. It involves at last a 2.1 acre plot of land being transformed to house low income seniors of our community in the year 2022; elderly who have been tossed aside by society, who have worked hard all their lives but have very little too show for it towards the last part of their lives, will be welcomed to our back lot into beautiful new apartments and well-managed facilities. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to share with you, dear friends of Redding, that a new vision is coming closer into view and is just around the corner. A new concept has been revealed for housing the unsheltered who shiver under bridges and cower in the dark, who long for a place to belong so they can finally begin behavior changes for the good. Lockable, secure micro-shelters have been approved by city government and between 4-12 will be built by CHYBA young people, those same young adults who helped many Carr Fire survivors rebuild their properties over the past 3 years. California Heritage Youth Building Academy will construct tiny homes on the back property of St. James Lutheran Church if people like the First Christian Church family and others step up to support the
venture. Unsheltered pre-approved individuals will be given a micro-shelter of their own and be guided by a paid social worker courtesy of Lutheran Social Services with 24/7 monitoring on site. It is similar to Francis Court & Cornelius House but for singles rather than families. The site plan costs $4000 to kick-off the work; once that is provided then federal and city grants help to bring it to reality in partnership with volunteer hands and spirits. A flyer is available on the back table depicting the kind of program which originated in Eugene, Oregon that we long for here. It is more than we are doing for the unsheltered currently and in this case, more is a very good thing.

Thirsting for more, we gather on the first Sunday in December, to peek over the horizon, stand on our tiptoes with Isaiah, and catch sight of more than we dared to imagine. Somebody goes home from church newly discontented with present arrangements, thirsty for more. Someone gets ready for more than just another Christmas, hungry for more. Advent becomes adventure and the business of Jubilee, the year of the Lord, becomes now and we dare to wish more for ourselves, more for others, and more for our world. So just how thirsty are you?