### “Milk without Money” Steve Finlan for The First Church, August 6, 2023

**Isaiah 55:1–5**

1Ho, 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. 2 Why 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 . . . 3 Incline your ear, listen . . . I will make with you an everlasting covenant. . . 5 See, 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.

**Matthew 14:14–21**

14 When Jesus went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. 15When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” 16Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” 17They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” 18And he said, “Bring them here to me.” 19Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples. . . 20All ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. 21And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Have you ever experienced something good that was completely unexpected? I think we see that in both of the readings today. Remember the authors of the books of the Bible were human, just like you and I. They wrote from their experiences and their visions in their own spiritual journey.

In the Isaiah passage, the Lord is promising to give wine and milk for no cost, for which one does not have to labor, and it is food that really satisfies (55:1–2), maybe implying that it’s better than ordinary food for which we *do* have to labor. So it’s a surprising and unearned gift offered by God.

Further, the author promises that nations whom the Jews do not even know will “run to you, because of the Lord your God” (55:5), probably to be taught about God. The Jews will have surprising spiritual success, and will be sought out as leaders and teachers. Elsewhere this author speaks of the Jews being “a light to the nations” (42:6; 49:6). What a surprising and amazing role to have! This promise continues in later biblical writings, but it starts to find expression here in the writings of Second Isaiah. Foreigners will run up to Jews and ask for help. Because they follow God, they will be recognized as spiritual leaders.

No less surprising is the miracle in the gospel passage, where Jesus is able to multiply the loaves and fishes while they are being distributed. For a miracle, this occurs in a very calm and well-organized setting. He has the people sit down on the grass. In Mark’s version of the story, he has them sit down in groups of “hundreds and fifties” (Mark 6:40). He gives the food to the disciples and they give it to the people. “And all ate and were filled” (Matt 14:20). It all seems to be a very calm and relaxed setting, although the buzz of conversation must have arisen and accelerated when people realized that a miracle was happening. Those sitting closest to the apostles as they started out could have *seen* how little food they had, and then saw how it didn’t run out as it was distributed. So much was handed out that everyone was filled, and there were even leftovers, twelve baskets full.

Sometimes I think how good it would have been to be in Galilee during Jesus’ lifetime, to be able to benefit from his miracles. We seem to be less fortunate, and miracles are harder to come by. But Jesus addressed this issue, or at least one aspect of it, when he later said to the apostles that it was good that he would be departing, because if he did not, then the Comforter would not come to people, and this Comforter, or Spirit of Truth, he said in John 16, would lead them into all truth (John 16:7, 13). If we allow that Spirit of Truth to function within us, then we have something that none of the apostles had, that none of those people eating miraculously multiplying food had.

It’s the other miracles, the healings, that I really envy. What if my eyesight could be healed, or my diabetes? It is the healings about which we are probably most likely to feel envious. Yet, it’s still true that we have something that none of those people had. We have the Spirit of Truth. It is so much a part of us that we often don’t know it is there. Are we really drawing upon that spirit as much as we could? Do we really value spiritual progress as much as we should? The public does not seem to seek out spiritual growth as much as they pursue their material needs. But *we* in our own understanding can learn to seek the spiritual aspect of life.

How can we know if we are drawing upon the Spirit of Truth? I think the first piece of evidence is that Jesus’ words will echo in your heart. They will resonate. Also in John 16, Jesus says that “he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (16:14). In John 14, he had already said the Spirit “will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (14:26). So the Spirit recalls and reinforces Jesus’ words. If his words have a resonance in your heart, that is evidence that the Spirit of Truth is active within you. It fosters a kind of spiritual sensitivity.

Does this sensitivity manifest itself in any other way? I think it shows up in one’s ability to recognize spiritual living in others. The Spirit makes us sensitive to spiritual motivation in other people, so it contributes to spiritual unity, respect, and alliance among people. The Spirit is a peacemaker in this regard, fostering understanding rather than competition between believers.

I think there’s one other way that the Spirit is evidenced in our lives, and that is in alerting us to the inward and spiritual meaning of the Bible. Instead of focusing on dogmatic positions, we will tend to gravitate toward the inner and spiritual power that comes to us from being open and receptive to God. The Spirit will help us to understand in a spiritual way a passage like Isaiah 55. We will recognize that it is talking about spiritual nurturing, not about literal food. The food that satisfies is spiritual truth taking root in our hearts. The wine and milk that are free are spiritual values freely offered to us.

So inwardness, spiritual sensitivity, and a love of Jesus’ words are evidence that the Spirit of Truth is operative in our lives. And the fruits of that operation, if first allowed to blossom, will be spiritual liveliness and spiritual unity with others of a similar inclination. I might even give additional names to the Spirit. It is the Spirit of Sensitivity, the Spirit of Peace, and the Spirit of Inwardness.

Are we grateful for the miracle in our lives, the Spirit that makes us deeper and more responsive to God and to spiritual reality around us? We sing “Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love what Thou dost love, and do what Thou wouldst do.” What God loves are spiritual values or realities. The Spirit of Truth and Peace and Inwardness helps us to love what God loves. This is like spiritual food and drink for our souls.

So seek for your understanding of the Spirit’s action within you. What spiritual path is calling to you? Is there an inward need, a pull, a desire for change that is calling to you? Is there a spiritual hunger that you need to get filled? Well, thanks be to God.