

“Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters” (Isaiah 55:1)

These opening words to the 55<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah spoke to me this past week as Amanda, and I hiked through a land laden with waterfalls. Transylvania County, North Carolina, just south of Asheville, contains 250 waterfalls. There is something majestic about a waterfall. The sight alone is awe-inspiring and beautiful. Then there is the sound which is soothing and restorative, at least in my experience. Hiking a long trail there are times you begin to wonder if it will be worth it, will you ever get to where you are going, is the waterfall on the map really there? Just when your mind begins to coax you to turn around and head back to the car, your legs are weary, tongue is parched and the sweat is dripping from your brow there in the distance you begin to hear sweet music, the joyful melody of cascading waters, breaking through the stillness of the forest, and calling you onward to the reward at the end of the journey. The dance of those rolling waters creates a masterful composition of God’s creative genius. As I watched and listened to a handful of waterfalls, I couldn’t help but hear these words, “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.”

I took video of three of those waterfalls located in the DuPont State Forest in Cedar Mountain, NC. It’s a time such as this a monitor would be ideal, but we work with what the good Lord has provided and trust he will do the rest and his glory will shine through.

(Play video)

Just watching and listening to these short clips brings life to me. It provides joy and wonderful memories of precious time with Amanda. I can only fathom as the Israelites remained in exile at the hands of Babylon these words of God spoken via the prophet surely must have been music to their ears and nourishment to their dry bones and parched souls. This chapter brings to conclusion what was begun in chapter 40 and is often referred to as “Second Isaiah.”

Let us recall the first verse of Chapter 40, “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.” This is the work God is bringing to fruition for God’s people displaced from their homeland and chapter 55 is the invitation to the new exodus back. “Come to the waters” God directs them.

A new day is set to begin. Restore your souls. Listen to the good news spoken by your God. Hear the everlasting covenant God has made with your ancestors and extends now to you. Come and find life you that are weary. Come and wade in the cool waters only God can provide. Let the great Shepherd lead you to still waters.

Shortly after the invitation to come to the waters the Lord seems to make it known the people have made choices to seek life via other means saying, “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” (v.2)

It's a question that is relevant yet today? In what do we choose to give so much time and energy thinking it will provide life, but may be doing exactly the opposite? What do we allow to drain us mentally, physically, and spiritually? The Lord seems to be reminding his people that true nourishment, real and everlasting life, is found in one place. The One who has always been and will always be. The Alpha and Omega, beginning and end.

As Christians, we might hear these words of hope echoed in the words spoken by our Lord to the Samaritan woman at the well that those who drink of the water he gives will never thirst again. (John 4) Or we might be led yet again to the waters of baptism in which we are filled with the Holy Spirit just as our Lord was.

Psalms 42 states, "As a deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God." What is your soul panting for this morning? Where are those parched places in need of the abundant, restorative, and life-giving water offered by our Lord? "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters."

The promise is sure today just as it was then. This water never runs dry. It is always freely given. On your hike of faith, as you climb mountains that never seem to end, tax every muscle in your body, try to catch your breath and wonder when the waterfall might reveal itself or the grueling ascent will give way to a much easier descent, may these words of comfort, hope, promise and life be those that play out in the recesses of your mind and heart nourishing you, strengthening you, leading you and reminding you always of the new day God is continually ushering in, the new opportunities he opens to us and the many ways he comes to us, draws near to us, and fills us with the water of life. "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters."

When have these waters filled you? Replenished your weary soul? We need to tell the story. Clearly, all of you present this morning or who join later today, or this week are led by the Spirit to encounter yet again week in and week out the renewing, abundant, water of life Jesus provides. You know the joy it provides. You hear the sweet melody, the cascading words of promise, feel the spray of God's love on your parched soul, and know of the restorative and healing power of grace found in Christ. Yet, there are so many who do not. So, the question for the church remains how do we, filled with that water and led by the Spirit, assist in God's work to draw others to this water? I believe it starts with telling our story. Naming those times, ways, and experiences we have in which the water of love, life, and hope have restored us. I invite you to ponder that now, briefly, and then share that with someone nearby. For those of you gathered online, please type in a response. And then, as we are sent on our way at the end of worship, hear yet again the promise Christ is with you and is using you to "Share the good news." Thanks be to God!