

HO!
United Church of Broomfield
August 6, 2023

Isaiah 55:1-5 (NKJV)

“Ho! Everyone who thirsts,
Come to the waters;
And you who have no money,
Come, buy and eat.
Yes, come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without price.
2 Why do you [a]spend money for what is not
bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And let your soul delight itself in abundance.
3 Incline your ear, and come to Me.
Hear, and your soul shall live;
And I will make an everlasting covenant with
you—
The sure mercies of David.
4 Indeed I have given him as a witness to the
people,
A leader and commander for the people.
5 Surely you shall call a nation you do not
know,
And nations who do not know you shall run to
you,
Because of the Lord your God,
And the Holy One of Israel;
For He has glorified you.”

Isaiah 55:1-5 (MSG)

1-5 “Hey there! All who are thirsty,
come to the water!
Are you penniless?
Come anyway—buy and eat!
Come, buy your drinks, buy wine and milk.
Buy without money—everything’s free!
Why do you spend your money on junk food,
your hard-earned cash on cotton candy?
Listen to me, listen well: Eat only the best,
fill yourself with only the finest.
Pay attention, come close now,
listen carefully to my life-giving, life-
nourishing words.
I’m making a lasting covenant commitment with
you,
the same that I made with David: sure, solid,
enduring love.
I set him up as a witness to the nations,
made him a prince and leader of the nations,
And now I’m doing it to you:
You’ll summon nations you’ve never heard
of,
and nations who’ve never heard of you
will come running to you
Because of me, your God,
because The Holy of Israel has honored
you.”

Ho!

If you are using the KJV or a number of other versions of the Bible, you will see this word at the beginning of Isaiah 55:1. In Hebrew it translates as “Ho,” but seriously, it can also translate as, “Alas, Ah, Ha or Woe!” And it means what you’d think it means – in the English, we might say, “Hey” or “Yo!” It’s an exclamation to get one’s attention, which is what Isaiah is trying to do.

HO, is a particle that was sometimes used to get the attention of the dead in funerary laments. If this is the background, Israel in exile is begin addressed as though it is dead in exile. This invitation to a free banquet may be modeled on ritual meals for the dead in which the dead were summoned to partake in

the food offering. This all seems accurate when we remember to whom, Isaiah is writing - EXILES in Babylon, a people deprived of abundant food, water and “flourishing life.” There is no longer a king. No longer a temple. They may not be dead, but they probably felt like it.

Hey! “listen up, pay attention, look over here!” All you who are thirsty, come ...

Isaiah’s ministry lasted over a period of 50 years or more and his message was primarily to Judah, at least at first, and later to the nation in captivity to Babylon.

His message had a two-fold purpose. One was to bring warning and then comfort to his beloved nation which had turned her back on God, and the other was to prophesy concerning an age that would come long after Isaiah was gone and would affect not only Israel but the entire world.

Isaiah served the Lord faithfully and zealously, with a great love for God’s people. He was preaching then (and now) to a people whom God loves, but foolishly turns away from.

Here is what British expositor, G. Campbell Morgan had to say about Isaiah:

“The whole story of the prophet Isaiah, as it is revealed to us in this one book, is that of a man who spoke to an inattentive age or to an age which, if attentive, mocked him and refused to obey his message, until, as the prophetic period drew to a close, he inquired in anguish, ‘Who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?’”¹ I admit that I sometimes feel the kind of discouragement Isaiah may have experienced – seeing an age where people are inattentive or completely disinterested in a God that loves us and desires to give us an abundant life.

Therefore, “HO!”

This message goes out to everyone; **EVERY ONE**. It sounds like a blanket invitation, but it is both *generally* all-encompassing, and *specifically* direct.

The nation as a whole may have turned a deaf ear to the prophet’s message and as a nation suffered the consequences. But even in the midst of national decline the individual can make a choice to listen and benefit. Whether its Israel or America.

I think that you’ve heard me say that I don’t believe that America is a “Christian Nation.” It was never the intention of our founders. Nations are not Christian; people are Christians. And they are Christians largely in the midst of nations governed and led by inattentive people, or people who, if attentive, mock and refuse to obey the truths of basic compassion and love for humanity and creation.

As Christians, we forget that God’s invitation isn’t a top-down approach of broadly legislating Christian influence upon the masses through television or social media, or even through courtrooms. Our acceptance of God’s invitation and subsequently our participation as co-creators, is inviting individual

¹ Westminster Pulpit, vol. 10, p. 10

people, being in relationships – one-to-one commitments - where we say, “Hey, you’re loved and I’m going to show you and prove it by sharing a meal with you, inviting you to sit at the table with me.”

Israel was a nation that had fallen apart and been dragged away into captivity. An entire people, through willful neglect of truth and disobedience to God, idol worship, adultery, sacrifice of their own babies, paying homage to foreign gods, homeless and destitute and in slavery.

Despite the sin and rejection of God, God offered the very staples of life, free of cost and with no questions asked. We see in these verses an offer of water, milk, wine, and bread; not only water to quench thirst, but milk for strength and wine for gladness and bread for sustenance and growth.

All of these things are used throughout scripture to symbolize God’s Word – Jesus, the Christ. And these are the things God continues to offer, not only in a physical sense but more importantly in a spiritual sense, to a modern world that unfortunately is repeating the errors of Israel’s ways.

God did not then and does not now, angrily or spitefully withhold the offer of abundant life and say, “Hey! You sinned, you disobeyed, you’ve made horrible decisions, and worshipped gods other than me, so this offer is only for those who have been pure.” God doesn’t say, “Hey, you don’t have any money and have nothing to give, so you’re not invited.”

God says to EVERY ONE, “Hey! Don’t worry about the cost. Don’t worry about the past. Why spend what you have on that which doesn’t satisfy and endure?” Come! Drink. Eat.

Last week I mentioned lottery winners and how, so often, many realized that true satisfaction wasn’t found in “the things of this world.” Even with millions and millions, there is never enough.

“Listen carefully to Me and eat what is good and delight yourself in abundance”. The prophet is offering that which the world cannot and it is eternal and it is eternally satisfying.

Seven centuries after Isaiah, the same offer was made to an obscure Samaritan woman, “...whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”²

Isaiah says, “Incline your ear and come to Me.”

Hey! Listen!with attentiveness and deliberateness, lean in and hear God’s Word.

As I wrote this I had an odd visual of football cheerleaders surround Isaiah chanting, “Be attentive, Be Be attentive.” It’s funny and amusing, but I think it’s applicable to this passage screaming “Ho!” to get your attention and then “Incline your ear...” to remind you to KEEP your attention on the Lord. God has made an offer, given the invitation and now listen – there is more to come.

² John 4:14

One of symbols and phrases of the United Church of Christ is the “comma” and we say, “God is still speaking.” God continually is saying, “Hey! Listen! Come!” That’s the challenge of the church today. Getting people to listen in a society and in an age where people’s ears and eyes are being bombarded daily, hour by hour, with noise and flash.

The paradox is, while modes of communication are rampant and seemingly unlimited, people are largely inattentive. We talk past each other.

Have you ever done this, you’re at a retail store and at the end of your transactions, the clerk says, “Thanks, come again” and you say, “Thanks, come again” -- what? Were you listening? Were you paying attention to what the person in front of you said? It’s like we’re dead inside, just robotic automatons either not responding, or responding with “nothingness.”

God is trying to get the attention of individuals. “Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen -- that you may live.” ... ***that you may live.***

There is nothing in the Bible, anywhere, to indicate that “WE” have been given some secret to keep. And at what point did we begin thinking it was ok to put a price on what only God can give and which God gives freely and graciously?

“HO! Clean up your act and you will be acceptable to us!”

“HEY! Live a heterosexual life or you won’t experience abundant life!”

“YO! Do this...DO that... DON’T say this... DON’T say that and *then you’ll inherit the kin-dom of heaven.*”

No, no. Listen.

“Every one” “Come” “Eat” “Freely” “No cost” “Listen” “Live”.

God said it.

Jesus taught it.

Isaiah prophesied it.

Everyone thirsts and hungers for an abundant life – one that is fulfilling, joyful, long....and hopefully eternal. We are fortunate to be part of a family that knows the benefits and delights of being in community with one another. Sharing our lives together – the uplifting and the challenging.

So, now it's our turn. Share it with every individual you meet - every chance you get.

Hey! Come. Eat and drink – no cost! ...and live!

AMEN