

Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church

Sermon

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Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church
1225 Piper Boulevard, Naples, FL 34110

Buying Bread that Satisfies

Isaiah 55:1-9 • 3rd Sunday in Lent

Repent! The voice shouts. Change your ways. Sometimes it's an amplified voice in the marketplace, squawking out Repent! Sometimes it's an interruption in our everyday busy-ness. It may come through a persistent small child asking for a glass of water. It may come as a quiet little nudge of conscience within us. We've heard that voice before. Not always in the same way, and certainly with a variety of words. But the underlying meaning is the same. Stop what you're doing! Seek God while you have the opportunity. No better time than the present to turn your lives around. God is near. Interruptions. Persistent patience. Quiet inner prompting. A variety of voices all saying the same thing: Seek God now.

We're likely to ignore the voices, you and I. Oh it's not that we don't want to turn to God. We're just convinced we already have turned to God. That objectionable interruption in the marketplace is just a whacko religious zealot. The child asking for water is always asking for water, or pop or a snack — always something! Then there's that quiet witness who prays at the restaurant - if you can believe that! And the twinge of guilt that flashes through our brains when we realize we didn't. It's not that we're opposed to people praising God in public. We don't intentionally ignore children's needs. And we don't object to praying in restaurants. It's just that we can be Christians without that. We're already Christians. We don't have to listen to those voices.

Yes, we're Christians, you and I. That isn't in question. We're truly believers. But why do we waste our time and money on that which cannot satisfy? Are there not other uses for our time and talents? Our faith, our beliefs aren't in question. But our lifestyles are. We're Christians. We don't have to defend that. But the voice from the scripture challenges us to ask probing questions of ourselves. What drives our quest for more? What about our faith leaves us dissatisfied? What void are we seeking to fill with possessions? The questions put us on the defensive. We feel attacked. But that isn't the issue. Instead of attack, the dialog is an invitation. The voice probes for the root of our frenetic life-styles. Why spend money for that which isn't bread. Why work for that which doesn't satisfy?

It's true! We do accumulate many unnecessary items. Again, we must be careful here. This is no call for radical action that gives everything away. There's nothing here that would condemn us for buying a house or a car. But if our indebtedness prevents us from sharing, we've gone too far. There's nothing here to condemn spending a few weekends at the cottage. But if we're so tied to the cottage that we have no time for family, friends or people in need, we're prisoners of our investment. Nothing here to condemn hard work. Nothing against seeking higher wages. But if our quest for advancement deprives us of life, if our zeal for more consumes us, if our new gadget or three, turns into seven or nine, we've gone too far. Take an inventory. You'll find a house full of stuff you haven't used for years. Closets full of clothes, more televisions than you can watch, more radios than you can listen to, more, more, more. Yet when we go to the store, our eyes wander and our hunger for more, better, newer, rages.

Maybe we have drifted away from our core values. Oh, we haven't abandoned our faith, but we've let the fire die down a little. The culture around us is alluring, with its gods of consumption, wealth and power. All this accumulation of stuff suggests a deep, spiritual hunger that won't be satisfied with more or better. And if we've drifted away, surely God's calling us back through the different voices of life. That deeply religious character downtown. That voice may catch our ear for a purpose. It's OK to listen.

We don't have to start dancing in the street. But we might. We don't have to start tithing. But we might. We don't have to start studying scripture, and praying regularly. But we might. And we just might find it deeply satisfying. Maybe we have drifted away. But we don't have to stay away.

Listen! God has a good word for us, word that provokes thought, and challenges priorities. Our ways are not God's ways, and God's ways are not our ways. Our ways of forgiving are not God's way. Our ways of pursuing happiness are not God's way. More is not better. Seek God while he may be found. Turn to God while he is near. The source of life is not a summer cottage up north and a winter home in Florida. Happiness is not a bigger house, a faster car, a bigger TV. A successful church is not a full-service church with programs for everyone, cradle to grave. A successful church is one that keeps people in touch with Christ. Turn now. Be healed. We don't need more things or more things to do. Instead, we need to do what God desires. Drink deep from the wells of spiritual nourishment that never run dry. Turn away from the wickedness of the world. Return to God for mercy. For God will surely pardon.

The bread of life doesn't cost anything. But it does come at a price. The bread of life modifies our priorities. And that's the risk we run in eating it. The water of salvation has no price, but it does cleanse us. And when we're cleansed, when we're transformed, somehow our old ways aren't so attractive anymore. Our old values have no power. Old friendships may have no meaning. Or else they will be transformed into entirely new relationships. When we're transformed, we value people not for what they do for us, but for who they are. Renewed faith, fills us with new trust.

We've heard the voices calling us to repent. We've felt the urge to make some changes. It is God's voice that calls us back. Come, buy this bread that satisfies. It comes without price, but it fills you with joy. Come drink this juice, for surely those who trust God will be filled.