

St. Giles' Episcopal Church
The Great Vigil of Easter – April 23, 2011
Isaiah 55:1-11
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

The passage we just heard from the prophet Isaiah begins with a call from God to the people. “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money . . .” Buy without money. At first when I thought about these words, I assumed the prophet was describing a “free gift,” as our stores advertise it, the offer of goods at “no charge.”

But that isn't correct. The offer is to buy without money. What does it mean to buy something? To buy may be – and for us in our culture this is usually the case – to acquire something in exchange for money or its equivalent, such as a bank check or a credit card. We exchange the “coin of the realm,” the legal tender of the United States, for the goods and services we need and desire.

Another way to buy is to acquire by sacrifice, exchange, or trade. This is at the core of our system of earning wages. We give up – sacrifice – our time to do work that is valuable to a person or to an organization of some kind in exchange for money and benefits. We “buy” our wages with our time and skills. Our labor is valued as equivalent to money by those who want our work and give us money in exchange. We can also bypass the use of money through bartering goods for goods, goods for services, etc.

So, God, through Isaiah, first speaks about buying without money, and then shifts to the issue of how we spend our money and our labor. “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” These are good questions just on the level of time management or managing a budget. Why waste

your effort or your money on anything that isn't nourishing and satisfying? It makes sense to "eat what is good," even to "delight ... in rich food."

But God's message to the people isn't really about wine and milk, bread or rich food, or spending our money wisely. God's message is about our relationship with God. God says, "Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant." Scripture records that God has offered God's people this covenant time and again, and we have broken the covenant. Yet, as we say in the words of Eucharistic Prayer C, "Again and again, you called us to return." God sent the prophets, like Isaiah, to deliver the offer of covenant, and finally God sent Jesus.

God's offer to us of a relationship with God is freely made by God. The bargain isn't about an exchange of goods and services. That's something to remember when we pray. The offer is an exchange of love for love: the steadfast, sure love of God for God's people on one side and our love for God, small and flawed though it may be, on the other. In Holy Week we are reminded that God's offer of love for us was costly to God. Jesus paid the price of love with his life.

A final thought about God's offer of loving relationship. God does not make us "an offer we can't refuse," as the gangsters do. We declare that God is full of power, yet God does not use power, as the world knows power, to "persuade" us into covenant. God gives us the freedom to choose how we will respond to God's love. We are free to reject God, even when we have seen the evidence of God's love in the cross of Christ.

God seeks to draw us into relationship, to woo us, through the power of love: self-giving love, poured out, received, returned, raised up, and glorified. In our lesson from Isaiah God declares: "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do

not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

God’s word, Jesus Christ, has accomplished God’s purpose and succeeded in God’s mission. Jesus Christ has shown us God’s love in a new way. He has established a new covenant with us. The love of God in Christ has not and never will return to God empty. There is no greater power than the love of God, and tonight we celebrate the awesome victory of God’s love over death and evil and all the forces that work against God and love.

Is there anything better we can do with our lives than give our love to God who has given us so much?