

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Pentecost 11

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Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz

The feast is ready! Come to the feast!

—Isaiah 55:1-5

I have the answer to all the world's problems. I have a remedy for hopelessness and despair; I possess the solution to loneliness and sorrow. I have something that inspires courage in the face of danger, confidence in the face of disaster and comfort in the face of death. I have the solution to human conflict, the key to successful relationships, the solution to wars and hatred and world hunger and poverty, the answer to vice and greed. Take what I have and run with it, and you will find that your marriage is better than it has ever been. Now this is where it gets even better: What I have to offer you is a cure for cancer, the end of heart disease, a cure for multiple sclerosis, the answer to arthritis and Alzheimer's. It is nothing less than the antidote to death itself. This is starting to sound like one of those "As seen on TV" commercials: the all-purpose product that cuts, slices, peels, dices and does the dishes—but this is better. You can't buy this from Amazon or the Home Shopping Network. In fact, you can't buy it at all. But I can give it to you; it's absolutely free—the worst thing I could do would be to try to sell it to you and make a profit. Truth is, you may already possess it yourself. Do you know what it is?

All of these answers, all of these solutions to life's most debilitating diseases, to the world's most vexing problems, and to the last enemy of death itself are found in the Bible, in Holy Scripture. It's the Word of God. It's not some otherworldly philosophy detached from reality. No, it's God's blueprint for the human race, his plan for eternal reconciliation with you, his design for your life and his purpose for your world—all that wrapped up and written down on a pound or two of paper, just waiting to be taken up and absorbed by your soul. That's the Bible.

Now here's my question to you: Do you know what it says?

Unfortunately, I'm afraid that many Christians don't know what it says. Supposedly some 80% of the people who say that they follow the Christian religion don't know the teachings of Christ. Many don't know that we shouldn't post "OMG" (that stands for "Oh my God!") on our social media comments because that's a misuse of the name of God, and God will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. Many don't know that we can't just get married and divorced, because Jesus said that if a man divorces his wife and marries another woman he commits adultery. Many don't know that we can't just punctuate our speech with expletives and salty words, because Jesus said, "Let your 'Yes' be yes and your 'No' be no, for anything beyond this comes from the evil one." Many don't know that salvation is a free gift from God. They're still trying to earn God's favor because they haven't read in Scripture, "It is by grace you have been saved through faith."

Let's take a closer look at God's Word this morning; let's feed our souls for a few moments and hopefully walk away from God's house today spiritually satisfied but also with our appetites whetted for more of the taste of the delightful goodness of God.

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters." This past week was wicked hot here in the Valley. Put yourself out in the sun, working at digging a ditch with a pick and shovel. As your clothes get crusted with the salt of your sweat you put down your tools, go inside head for the fridge, and to quench your raving thirst you reach for . . . a soda? No! Or worse yet, a beer? No! Absolutely the wrong thing to drink. When your thirst is reaching its limit and your body is craving fluids, the last thing you need is some sweet, syrupy sugar beverage or a dose of alcohol. You need water! What you should have done is gone to the kitchen sink and downed a few glasses of room-temperature plain old water to get your body re-hydrated, and then you could relax and enjoy your favorite beverage—in moderation, of course.

You and I get thirsty. We get spiritually thirsty. Our soul needs refreshment, but we need to know where to go to get the spiritual refreshment our soul craves. So often you and I head for the spiritual fridge and reach for the wrong beverage. We're feeling kind of down, so we say, "Maybe if I get my credit card out and just buy myself a little something, I'll perk up." But we still feel empty and thirsty, because material things don't satisfy. Or we feel unfulfilled, so we figure if we just immerse ourselves in our work and put in a few extra hours it'll bring success and meaning to life. Or we feel lonely, so we go bar hopping or web surfing hoping to make a human connection—and it usually ends in more emptiness and heartache. We experience loss or grief and we turn to the self-help tools filled with the latest paperback fad, and we only end up thirstier and thoroughly confused.

"Come to the waters," says the LORD through the prophet Isaiah. Drink at the delicious pools of the refreshing Word of God. I wasn't exaggerating about the power of God's Word to answer our problems and change our lives. In your loneliest, darkest hours remember the refreshing Word of your gracious God who says, "Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). When your world seems filled with turmoil and conflict, remember Jesus' words, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who

mistreat you” (Luke 6:27,28), and how he promises you along with his disciples, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). When life itself seems empty, devoid of meaning, you’re knocking on the door of despair, and the challenges you face seem insurmountable, quench your thirst with the Lord’s Word, “Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

The blessings the Lord gives are yours without cost. God dispenses them so freely and so abundantly, just as he always has. He freely gave his greatest gift to the world and to you when he sent his only Son Jesus to live and die for the world. God’s Son carried your sins to the cross and suffered the price of God’s wrath that should have been directed toward you and me. From his wounds on the cross flowed the blood of redemption that made payment for the sins of the world, so that through faith in his blood we have the forgiveness of sins. That’s the ultimate spiritual satisfaction, brothers and sisters, the quiet, assured confidence that Jesus our Savior has washed us from our sins in his own blood. It’s the certainty—in life and in death and in trouble and in good times, when our world is at peace and when it all seems out of control—that the deepest craving of our soul has been satisfied. The hunger and thirst for a relationship with our God has been filled because of what Jesus did for you and me on the cross.

And can you believe what all this costs you? If I were selling some snake oil that promised to do all the things I promised at the beginning of the sermon, you can be sure it would cost you a very pretty penny. But no! The LORD invites us, “*And you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.*” All the gold, silver, stocks, bonds and real estate in the world could not buy the forgiveness of sins. Peace with God is only available at one place and for one price: it is only available through Jesus Christ, and it was already paid for with the eternal blood of the Son of God. To you, it is absolutely free!

“*Why spend your money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.*” I want you to picture with me another scenario. Leave the sweltering 110s of midday and picture a cool evening in the fall in downtown Tempe. A homeless man is shuffling down the street. All his worldly possessions he carries with him in a trash bag. He’s hungry, because the peanut butter sandwich he had yesterday and the cup of Ramen noodles he had today for lunch have already worn off. And he comes to the plate glass of a swanky downtown restaurant, and he looks inside through the window, and he can’t believe his eyes. There’s a corporate party going on, black tie, of course. In the middle of the room, amidst all the tuxedos and evening gowns is the most fabulous spread of food he has ever seen. The table, crowned with a beautiful ice sculpture is loaded with every kind of food imaginable—the best, the most high-class cuisine he has ever seen. (He feels his tummy growl, and he thinks back to lunch and those Ramen noodles.) Then it just happens that none other than the CEO chances a glimpse of this man standing outside, and the CEO orders the maitre’d to go out and bring the guy in. After all, there’s enough to go around. Of course the man needs to be cleaned up and prepared for this formal event, so they spruce him up. They trade his rags for some more appropriate attire, put his meager possessions in a secure place, and for the first time since he can remember this man of the street is safe and warm and well-fed and comfortable.

You and I were once beggars, dressed in the rags of our own filth and clinging to the chintzy material trinkets of this world. But you have been invited to a banquet, a well-spread feast for your soul. It’s my pleasure today to lay out before you all the sumptuous delicacies offered in God’s Word for your delight and satisfaction. Will you come in and eat better than you’ve ever eaten before?

The feast is ready! Come to the feast! Let’s ask ourselves: How can we make more frequent use of the Scriptures? Why don’t we make more frequent use of the Scriptures? Is it because we have no time? Are we so busy running after the Ramen noodles of earthly wealth and the peanut-butter sandwiches of our modern material lifestyles that we are not hungry for something so much better? Perhaps we are truly happy with what we’ve got and want nothing better. That’s sad, because Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6). Maybe it’s because we’re not in the habit and don’t know where to start? Perhaps some of the blame falls at my doorstep, because as a pastor I don’t always do the best job of teaching you how to read and use the Bible. (We can do that, you know—say, “Read the Bible, read the Bible,” and never really show people *how* to use the Bible.) I can personally tell you that I use the *One-Year Bible* for my daily Scripture reading (available in printed form or online at www.oneyearbibleonline.com). Each day has a reading from the Old Testament, from the New Testament, a Psalm and a couple verses from Proverbs. If you follow this format daily, you’ll read through the whole Bible in a year. You can also follow the Bible reading plan in the *Meditations*; it will also take you through the Bible in a year. These are just a couple helpful tools, but whatever method you use, take advantage of the opportunity to feed and satisfy your soul.

I wasn’t exaggerating about all the wonderful benefits that God’s Word brings. How can you be lonely, when Jesus Christ is your dearest and closest friend? How can you be afraid of anything, when Jesus says your sins are forgiven, even hell itself can’t touch you and God Almighty is for you? Oh yes, that bit about cancer, arthritis and Alzheimer’s? God has healed more serious afflictions through the simple power of prayer, and even if he

chooses not to do so in your case, child of God, no matter what affliction ails you, every one of us gets a new body in the resurrection, fresh, new, and glorified to last for all eternity.

Drink up! Fill your plate! Step up to the banquet. The feast is ready! Come to the feast! Amen.