Lent 3, Isaiah 55.1-9
Psalm 63.1-8, I Corinthians 10:1-13, Luke 13:1-9

Today's the third Sunday of Lent. We're well on our way to Jerusalem. As we journey with Jesus we know, as Jesus certainly knew, that in Jerusalem the cross is waiting. We claim that Jesus is fully human. Imagine yourselves, then, in his human shoes. Imagine walking, each day closer to the City of God. What was he thinking and feeling? How was he preparing himself for Jerusalem? Even though he was accompanied by friends and companions, the journey Jesus was making was surely a solitary one, a wilderness experience. How did he prepare himself to meet his enemies. Those who thought he was a threat to the Temple and the community? Who didn't understand him or his message or his ministry. How did he prepare himself for the pain—the physical, emotional, and spiritual pain that he must have known awaited him? How did Jesus get himself ready for the unexpected? The unknown?

As we journey to Jerusalem, what are we thinking and feeling? How are we preparing ourselves? How are we getting ready for times and seasons of pain? How do we prepare ourselves for deaths—physical death, but also emotional, emotional and physical losses? Lost relationships? How do we prepare ourselves to face trials? To bear crosses? Will we be ready? What are we holding on to that will prepare and sustain us? What are we letting go of that will distract us and weigh us down? The Lenten journey is long, and solitary. Not to be undertaken lightly.

And then. Then we hear the voice of the prophet Isaiah,

> All who are thirsty,
> Come for water,
> Even if you have no money;
> Come, buy food and eat:
> Buy food without money,
> Wine and milk without cost.

These words must have been part of Jesus' preparation for the events he was facing. Two chapters earlier in Isaiah 53 is the image and description of the suffering servant—and we know that who and how Jesus was during his trial mirrors the suffering servant. Jesus knew Scripture in his spirit, mind, soul, and in the flesh of his body. He *was* God's Word Incarnate. He used God's Word, he used his relationship with his Creator, to inform and direct his being, his doing, his responses and interactions. And he surely used God's Word for sustenance, for strength, for endurance, for preparation.

Isaiah's words offered Jesus the sustenance he needed. And they offer us sustenance; they're an oasis in our wilderness. God's Words in Isaiah are words to hold on to. They were words for the Israelites in exile to hold on to and they're words for us to hold close. To drink. To savor. To digest. To enflesh. "Even if you don't have money, come for water. Come buy food without money." What comforting and reassuring and sustaining words and images. "Buy food without money." What an impossible image. "Buy wine and milk without cost."

These Words grab and hold our attention as they're intended to do. They sound like invitation, but they're imperatives: Come. Buy. Eat. On this long Lenten journey, we need this water to satisfy our thirst. We need this bread to satisfy our hunger. We need sustenance for the road. We want and need the free and abundant grace God is giving. We may not be political exiles, but we know oppression and domination. We know the weariness and fatigue of deep hunger, insatiable thirst. We see and experience its effects. All around us and around our planet, we see exiles under the domination of socio-economics and racism, sexism, injustice. Some of us have and continue to experience the domination of systems and structures that are at work beyond our reach. We know what's it's like to feel like exiles,

even in our own homes and lives dominated by the demands of life. Of circumstances. Under the oppression of schedules, resources, cares and concerns.

Domination feeds on fear and scarcity, on violence and death. God's Word feeds us love and generosity, grace and abundant living. To the Hebrew exiles and to us, God's Words to Come, Buy, and Eat for free are in sharp contrast to the fear and scarcity that surround and tempt us each day. Come. Buy without price. Eat.

Then God asks, "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, Your earnings for what does not satisfy?" And we want to answer, for the Hebrew exiles and for ourselves, How can anything satisfy us when we're in exile? How can bread satisfy when we want to be free from oppression? Once this domination is ended, then we can be satisfied.

But God doesn't wait for their answer. And God continues before we can respond, "Hear Me well and eat good things. And you will delight in fatness. Turn your ears and come to Me; listen that your bodies and souls may live." More imperatives. Hear Me. Eat good things. Turn your ears. Come to me. Listen. Notice that in addition to food and eating, God is telling us to hear. To listen. And we begin to understand that God is asking us to consume something more bread and water. So we listen more carefully. Look more closely.

"All who are thirsty, Come for water." Rabbinic commentators understand water as a metaphor for Torah. We recognize that metaphor in the Gospel of John when Jesus offers Living Water to the woman at the well. "All who are thirsty, come for God's Word." Drink in the Word of God. It's free! It's abundant! This water that God offers is not and cannot be confined to the written Text, but exists all around us. In all of creation. In the air we breathe. In Scripture. But we have to turn our ears and listen.

God continues to speak to the exiles who are listening, continues to speak to us who are hearing. "I will make with you an everlasting covenant, The enduring loyalty promised to

David." God's covenant with King David is now a covenant with all the people, to God's people who are in exile. To us. And as David was a leader and commander of a nation, so now you, you who are exiles, are princes. No king or monarch is necessary to be a people of God. You are God's princes and princesses wherever you are, wherever you find yourselves. Even under foreign rulers, you are My princes. Even under the oppression of systems and circumstances, you are My queens.

This is Good Food. These Words are feasting words. They are comforting, satisfying, delightful. "Listen to these Words and you will live." The "you" pronoun in v 3 is the Hebrew word *nefesh*, which is most often translated as soul. "Listen to these Words and your souls will live." But the word means more than soul—it's our body, mind, spirit, soul. *Nefesh* is the word used in Genesis 2.7, "God blew into the human's nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being." The breath of God, the Word of God gives us our living being. Without it we are hungry and thirsty bodies. And God's breath is not limited by exile or by forces that dominate and oppress. God's Word breathes into our places of exile, into our spaces of oppression. The breath of God blows into us no matter where we are, no matter what circumstances we're in. "Listen to these Words and you will live." Listen to the these words and you will be a living being, given life by the Living God. There is no fear or scarcity or death in the Living God.

God's Living Word is offered. God's Breath and Spirit is blowing, available. Free. Abundant. But God doesn't force It on us. It's ours to come, to hear, to listen, to seek, to eat, to drink. That doesn't mean we'll always understand or approve or see and hear what God's Word is doing in the world. We can be sure of that! "For My plans are not your plans, Nor are My ways your ways." Our sight and hearing, our comprehension are limited, but God's breath is breathing and God's Word *will* be fulfilled.

But as the heavens are high above the earth,
So are My ways high above your ways
And My plans above your plans.
For as the rain or snow drops from heaven
And returns not there,
But soaks the earth
And makes it bring forth vegetation,
Yielding seed for sowing and bread for eating,
So is the word that issues from My mouth:
It does not come back to Me unfulfilled,
But performs what I purpose,
Achieves what I sent it to do.

Jesus understood God as his Living Bread and Living Water. He ate and drank from that Source, ate Good Food from the Word of God. Throughout his ministry Jesus spent his resources on that which satisfied and sustained him. Because he ate Living Bread and drank Living Water, he knew the fatness and delight of being loved by God. Time and again we watch and see Jesus spending his resources on that which satisfied him, that which will sustain him for his ministry. No matter if the religious and political leaders wanted to silence or stop him, Jesus would not be, could not be dominated by any earthly oppressors. His living being was nourished and nurtured by heavenly Water and Bread. He would not drink the water of fear and scarcity. He would not and did not eat the bread violence and death.

Jesus was prepared for Jerusalem, prepared for his trial and death because he ate and drank from his relationship with the Living God. Jesus was prepared because God's Word was in the fiber and breath of his body. Jesus was prepared because he gave himself, he let the Living God breathe into him giving him living being. In the same way that Jesus prepared his living being, we prepare ourselves. We let go of fear, oppression, scarcity. We let go of resources that cannot nourish or sustain or satisfy our living being. We spend our first resources buying the free Water and Bread of God's love and grace. Come. Eat. Delight and be fat!