



December 11, 2022

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Isaiah 35:1-10

The Light of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love:

Freedom From Want Brings...Joy!



Golden Verse: Isaiah 9:2

*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness — on them light has shined.”*

Rockwell’s painting, *Freedom from Want*, shows eager family members waiting to dive into a Thanksgiving meal. The table is nicely set with the presumed matriarch setting down the sumptuous turkey as the patriarch looks on. The youth have sly glances of anticipatory delight as the father peeks back at us as if to say, “Isn’t life wondrous!”

This painting reflects the abundance offered in Isaiah’s vision in the 35th chapter, EVEN THE desert finds lavish life! As we learned last week, peace came not only to people but to the animal kingdom in Isaiah 11, so too the abundance goes beyond the human realm...but this time to the plants!

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing.

But this text was not written to us or for us. For as delicious as that turkey must have been for the imagined family in Rockwell’s painting, its taste would be nothing close to Isaiah’s vision.

There is a saying, “Hunger is the best sauce,” meaning food tastes the most amazing when you are hungry. Proverbs shares a similar

insight, “A satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb, but to a hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet” (Proverbs 27:7). The hungriest I have ever been was a thirty-hour famine I did with the youth some years ago to raise funds for food. We broke the fast with pancakes and each bite was sheer and simple ecstasy. And yet, I knew my hunger would be easily abated.

Rockwell painted this scene as part of the bond effort to raise funds for WWII, as we know the times of war are times of hunger, as it was in Isaiah’s time, and often it is the innocent civilians who suffer the most. We know that many families in Europe and around the world suffered extreme hunger during those times. According to one account:

The genocide effected by the Nazi regime during World War II, intended for the local population in Eastern Europe, took the form of allocation of daily food rations: 100% for the Germans; 70% for the Poles; 30% for Greeks; 20% for Jews. Hermann Göring, the Reichsmarschall of the Nazi Empire created a blueprint for full alimentation of the occupying German forces through theft of land and food of the Soviet Union thus forcing its ... population to starve.

The same was true for the Jews to whom Isaiah wrote.

Last week we looked at Israel in the year 722 B.C. and we learned that surrounding empires were threatening their very existence. Today the worst fears have been realized some 150 years later.

The temple is destroyed, the land has been sown with salt, the poor left behind are destitute and the others exiled to Babylon are in despair. There is no feasting and there is no joy...

Listen to the lament of these people in Lamentations 1:

I called out to my lovers, but they have betrayed me. My priests and elders perished in the city while they searched for food to keep themselves alive...He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes; my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, 'Gone is my glory, and all that I had hoped for from the Lord.'

A gut-wrenching passage. These laments of Jeremiah are perhaps the greatest heartache next to the holocaust in whole history of Israel.

It may be hard for many of us to appreciate the full power of this vision because not many of us have known debilitating, life-threatening hunger. The Rockwell painting is a compelling scene of abundant joy, that many of us undoubtedly felt a few weeks ago at our Thanksgiving tables. But Isaiah is speaking into a context of severe deprivation.

Into which Isaiah offers a promise.

Where there was hunger and want and loss there will be abundance and joy. And this prophecy finds its ultimate fulfillment in the Christ child. Joy in the midst of poverty and sorrow.

And because of this Mother Mary's soul, "*magnifies the Lord and [her] spirit rejoices in God [her] king.*" and Mary tells us why, "*He will fill the hungry with good things.*" And later Jesus Himself declares, "*He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.*" Jesus delivers on His promise and the fulfillment of Isaiah's vision when He multiplies the loaves and the fishes.

But the joy of Isaiah's vision brings joy beyond food on the table for the hungry...

*...the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
...and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
...then the lame shall leap like a deer,
...and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy*

Again, all accomplished by the Christ. Joy will come through a wholeness, a Shalom, that God fashions for everyone not only the literal hungry but the spiritually bereft as well. Thus, upon Jesus' birth the angel tells the shepherds, "*I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all people.*"

And so, this is our mission, to begin doing the work of this joy while we await the final return of Christ to perfect it and complete it. It must be a joy we bring not only to our kith and kin but to all.

As we turn back to Rockwell's painting, we may think it brings promise only for the nuclear family, but it turns out the "family" depicted by Rockwell was no such thing. The actual people in the painting were friends of Rockwell in Vermont.

Listen to this description:

Upon first glance, Freedom from Want may read as a polished, white, middle-class, nuclear-family gathering, but, on a deeper level, the painting exemplifies the modern concept of chosen family, the idea that "family" is not validated through biological connection, but can comprise friends and neighbors who choose to play significant roles in each other's lives. Freedom from Want also explores the question of whom we welcome at our table ...for this is what Rockwell did in this painting; literally brought family and friends to the table of plenty and joy.

"Who we welcome at our table" lies at the very core of the Christ and of our church.

This promise of everlasting joy comes through another table, not the one we sat at with friends a few weeks ago. The table of joyful fellowship of course was set most gloriously in the simplicity of our Lord's Last supper. It is in the last supper that we become partners and friends of the Christ child in which He fills not only our stomachs but our souls.

And we remember, in defiance of the norms of His day, Jesus sat down and shared meals with the "so-called sinners and tax collectors." In other words, He sat down with those no one else would, and together they enjoyed holy fellowship.

For to be hungry is to suffer, to be isolated, alone, and to feel forgotten by the world is to be in despair. This is how Jeremiah felt when he wrote, "*The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me.*"

Into such deprivation Brick Church strives to become more and more like Christ, creating a table of love and welcome for the homeless, the hungry, and the alone. This is why the Tuesday Night Dinner Party is back and it is why it is a celebration. For like Isaiah, like Mary, and like the poor of Jesus' time, we discover superabundant joy when the Christ child widens our table so that all may go home not only with full stomachs but the abundance of God's love as well. Amen.