

Crazy Scott's Discount Emporium

Hespeler, March 20, 2022 © Scott McAndless – Lent 3

[Isaiah 55:1-9](#), Psalm 63:1-8, 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, Luke 13:1-9

Come on down to Crazy Scott's Discount Emporium today! You won't believe the deals I've got for you. You better grab them while you can, before they take me away for being so crazy! Would you like to have some gasoline? That is right, I am talking about that precious liquid that, as of last night, was selling for \$1.70 litre at the local gas station. At Crazy Scott's, you can have as much of it as you possibly could desire! Want to fill up your Humvee? Here you go! Heck, if you want to fill up your swimming pool you can do that.

No Money

What's that? You want to know how much it costs? Well, that is the truly crazy part because this gasoline is not being pumped based on how much money you have but rather based on what your need is. In fact, let me say this: "You that have no money, come, buy and guzzle!"

In fact, let's not just make this about gasoline. What if you are in need of the basics of life: bread, meat, vegetables or wine? Or how about water? Everybody needs water! We've got all of those things too and you can get them right now at the amazing, unbeatable price of, well, no money at all – no money down, no payments, no interest. I'm sure you're all asking how do I do it? Well, if you are asking that then you haven't been paying attention because there is only one explanation: I'm just plain crazy!

Inappropriate Commercial

So, what would you think if you saw a commercial like that right about now? In the middle of some kind of economic crisis, at a moment when inflation seems to be galloping out of control, there are a lot of people, especially those who are living on fixed incomes or whose pay has been depressed for a very long time, who are really struggling to make ends meet. Meanwhile people all over the place just can't afford to live in homes anymore. How would that make you feel?

You might take it as some kind of joke, perhaps a bad joke, but at least as an attempt at humour. Or you might receive it as something in pretty bad taste. How cruel to make fun of people who are struggling to get by making a joke of giving all of this stuff that's getting too expensive away. You might even say it would be inappropriate to include it in a sermon. But what if I were to tell you that that commercial was inspired by our reading this morning from the Prophet Isaiah?

The reading starts out very strangely. It starts with about the closest thing to a television commercial that you could find in the ancient world. Basically, back then, the only way that merchants had to market what they had to sell in



the marketplace was to literally call out to the people passing and tell them that they should buy their wares. It's the kind of thing that still sometimes happens in marketplaces to this very day. But back then, it was really the only way to market. So, the really weird thing is that this prophecy from the book of Isaiah begins with one of these calls that merchants traditionally would have made in the marketplace.

The Merchant's Call

"Ho," they would cry out to passers by, "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters." One would call out. And then, from another booth, "You that have money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk." Still another would be calling, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food!" Everyone would have been very familiar with these cries; they heard them all the time.

But, although the prophet is clearly imitating these cries, he's not copying them precisely. And that is because of what was going on at the time that this prophecy was made. There was an economic crisis. Inflation was out of control. As a result, huge numbers of people were just unable to afford the basic needs of life. They were being forced into debt that they would never be able to pay off. People were losing their homes and even having to sell family members into slavery.

The Prophet Changes it

So rather than call out what all the merchants would have called, he does the Crazy Scott's Discount Emporium version of the traditional market call: **"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 and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food."**

Now, the really unfortunate thing about these ancient prophecies is that all that got retained and written down were the words. Nobody wrote down the stage directions. Nobody wrote down what the prophet was doing as he or she said these things. But, in this case, I think it's pretty easy to imagine what he was doing. I am pretty sure that he actually set up a stand in the marketplace, probably in the big marketplace in Jerusalem, and he stood there alongside the other merchants and he was literally giving away his entire stock to anyone who needed it. This was actually the kind of thing that ancient prophets often did in Israel.

And of course, it was ridiculous. No one is going to sell their goods in the marketplace for nothing. And can you imagine the reaction of the other merchants who were trying to profit from all the inflated prices on everything? They must have been livid.

Why He did it

So why did he do it? He did it for the same reason that a prophet did anything. He did it because he was trying desperately to get a message from the LORD across to the people. And it was not a message that was just about spiritual realities that were totally disconnected from the physical struggles of people's lives.

I imagine that he really was giving away free water and bread and other things that people couldn't afford to buy. But, at the same time, he was not just playing at running a food bank. He was proclaiming something really important about God, and especially about what God cares about when people are really struggling to make ends meet.

Reacting to a Bad Economy

What happens when we are living through trying economic times? We see the reaction very clearly in our world right now. The worst economic effects in the last while have been in Russia, of course. Because if you think that we have been experiencing inflation lately, the Russians – reeling from sanctions and a plummeting Ruble – would probably tell you that we ain't seen nothing yet.

But we see the extreme reaction to economic disaster on full display there. There have been runs on the banks. People, who cannot even exchange what they have for foreign currency, have been desperate to buy anything they can possibly get their hands on. They're buying anything that might actually maintain its value. Basically, it seems, the present crisis has shown up just what an illusion the entire economic and monetary system is. The things that we thought had all the value, things like money, turn out to be almost without value and we are desperately searching for something valuable to replace them with. It is kind of a metaphor for the whole of modern society.

The Message We Need to Hear

So, what message is the prophet trying to get across, because I'm really starting to think that it might be a message that we need to hear. I believe that it particularly comes down to this verse: **“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy?”** We have all been caught up for so long in this endless cycle of working in order to get the good things in life. But we don't get the good things in life. We get money, and money, it turns out, does not necessarily equal value. The value can just disappear. Even more important, having the money, even if you spend it on things, does not mean that you will get the satisfaction that you truly need.

Yes, we are all struggling to get by in difficult times. It is heartbreaking to watch families having trouble feeding their children. It is disheartening to watch those who are on fixed incomes as their purchasing power gets less and less. But what we are discovering is that the things that we have built our economy on have a lot less value than we have been led to believe. They have value that can disappear so easily. We are learning that we cannot put our trust in these things.

What We Can Trust

So what can we trust instead? Well, that is really interesting, because the prophet reaches out to these people all around him who are just struggling to get by, and he tells them what they can trust in. **“Incline your ear, and come to me; Listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.”** The one thing that you can count on, in other words, is God's commitment to you. God has made an everlasting covenant and so will never fail to love God's people. The world teaches us to trust in money, but money will fail us. We are seeing it happening in the world right now. I know that many would consider it foolishness to trust

in God instead. I would argue that, at the very least, it is no less foolish to trust in that than in the false and potentially vanishing value that is found in money.

“Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, And the unrighteous their thoughts.” Of course, our tendency is to do the opposite. When we discover that our way of doing things is empty and meaningless, what do we do? We tend to double down. We bail out our currencies, we take measures to build up their false value because we are afraid to let go of the illusion of value. But we really ought to take advantage of times of crisis like this to be willing to look at the entire system and just ask the question, can we really think of value in a very different way?

“Let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, And to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” I think we would all be better off putting our trust in a God who is forgiving rather than a currency system that is anything but – that never offers any grace for those who fall through the cracks of the system for any reason.

The Prophet was Crazy

Was the prophet crazy to do what he did? Did everyone think he was being just plain foolish? Absolutely. But he was trying to shock the people who were living through a crisis into seeing a fundamental truth about God’s ways. **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”** So high above the ways of this world that, yes, they certainly do seem like complete and utter foolishness as far as this world is concerned. That was kind of the point of what he was doing.

And, I’ve got to tell you, I think we’ve seen some of that foolishness here at St. Andrews. We have become a key place in this community for people to turn to when they are struggling to make ends meet. They come here, not because it’s the only place they could go, not because there are more resources available here than any place else. They come here because we try to do our best, and the incredible volunteers we have here try to do their best, not to treat people as the world treats them. We try not to judge them according to the system of this world and how they measure up within it. And make no mistake, my friends, that is pure foolishness. That is craziness according to this world. And yet by the grace of God, we have seen good things happening here in people’s lives because of it. God’s love has been made real in countless incidences.

I do not say any of this in order to toot our own horns. We have done nothing really apart from being in the right place at a time of need. We have just been fools who have rejected the wisdom of this world. And God has brought blessing into our lives and into the lives of others as a result. There is real value in that, just not like the world measures value. No, the world is pretty sure that we are crazy.