

December 17, 2017

“Care and Covenant: The Discipline of Abundance” © - Rev Seth Jones

Scripture: Isaiah 55:1-13

■ Care & Covenant

- “Ho! everyone who thirsts, come to the waters...”

■ This is written around 540 BC, still in the time of exile.

- These are verses that anticipate coming home to Jerusalem and Israel after years of displacement in Babylon.
- The idea of homecoming as a ***way of being*** rather than *as a place*.
 - Last week was all about the nature of being
 - *This week is all about how we BE*
 - Homecoming as a way of being - at least here - is
 - God’s care for Creation
 - and God’s covenant

■ We engage God’s care of and covenant with Creation through the discipline of abundance.

- Some big ideas here
 - Homecoming
 - Care of creation
 - God’s covenant
 - God’s abundance
- Advent has a way of expanding our sense of what is about to come
 - It becomes difficult to hold all the possibilities of an unknown future
 - But these ideas are all of a piece. They all interrelate and weave together.
 - It is the nature of the fulfillment of God’s word in history and our lives

■ God’s abundance is a Biblical theme, as is homecoming, creation and covenant.

- verse 55:10
 - all about God’s abundance and taking joy in it, which ties into
- Ecclesiastes 8:15
 - Abundance
- Psalm 126
 - Homecoming, creation, covenant fulfillment

■ Homecoming as a way of living, thinking, being

- Demands a discipline of abundance
 - Seeing the potential and availability of God’s creation and covenant in our present experience
 - Discipline

- The rigorous, conscious application of our knowledge of God's work to our daily experience
- The discipline of abundance is simple:
 - As with all disciplines, there is the simple idea, and the application of the idea
 - It is in the application where things get complex
- Aspects of the discipline of abundance
 - 55:2b-3a
 - **Listen to God**
 - 55:3b
 - **trust in God's covenant** (a deep old Testament theme)
 - The example Isaiah uses is King David
 - the thing about David is not that we should be like King David
 - In many ways, he was a horrible King
 - But David is a model of God's promise fulfilled
 - NOT a model of behavior to follow.
- The discipline of abundance is difficult
 - We live in ideologies of scarcity
 - Scarcity demands a constant consumption of resources
 - Scarcity requires the need to accumulate and horde
 - Matthew 6
 - Look at the birds of the air...
 - Exodus
 - Manna
 - These are disciplines of abundance
 - Worldviews of limit and less than/more than
 - 55:8-9
 - God's way is the way of abundance and our way is the way of scarcity.
 - God's way of abundance requires
 - caring for the earth and God's people
 - trusting in the fulfilling of God's covenant
- 55:11
 - Do we believe this about God's promises, God's word
 - That it accomplishes God's purpose?
 - That God's desire transforms the world?
 - That ALL of creation responds to that?
 - If you are like me, this is a huge stretch for my faith
 - If you are like the people in the time of Mary and Joseph,
 - no wonder they, and we, need a Messiah, need Christ
- 55:12-13
 - This is why the homecoming in Scripture can't just be a place

- Why it is a *way of being*
 - If all of Creation responds to God's care and covenant
 - the hills burst into song -- Creation responds directly
 - then we must devote ourselves to a discipline that responds to God's care and covenant in the same way the rest of Creation does
 - like the animals, the shepherds, the stars at the birth of Christ, the fulfillment of the Covenant in the birth of Jesus.
- Homecoming in Isaiah is presented as abundance
 - Food and drink without price
 - And it is also to be taken in with joy
- The Discipline of Abundance is the way of homecoming
 - Ghost of Christmas Present in A Christmas Carol
 - Scrooge (1970) with Albert Finney
 - Goal of the Ghost of Christmas Present is to show Scrooge what he's missed by not staying present to what's around him
 - So Scrooge misses the beautiful people,
 - he misses all the food that's being shared,
 - he misses the giving and generosity of others,
 - the generosity and abundance that's all around him
 - Even Bob Cratchit, who has nothing because Scrooge pays him nothing, figures out, at least on this day, how to create abundance for his family
- The discipline of abundance is doing what Bob Cratchit does and what the Ghost of Christmas present calls Scrooge to do
 - SEEK the generosity and abundance within others and ourselves
 - EVEN when we're in exile, or in a state of exile, we can always have a *state of being that's always coming home*
 - It's the winding pathway to true homecoming
- Here is the other thing about the discipline of abundance the Ghost of Christmas Present shows us
 - Generosity and abundance is not about wealthy people giving things to poor people.
 - THAT CAN'T BE YOUR MOTIVATION
 - Remember what is under the robe of the Ghost of Christmas Present
 - Poverty and Famine
 - Your motivation must be homecoming
 - which is embodied in living in the care for God's Creation and the continuing fulfillment of God's Covenant
 - not just your homecoming but EVERYONE's homecoming
 - Isn't that what is depicted at the end of A Christmas Carol?
- Homecoming and Abundance are two sides of one coin

- They exist together, and are only possible when everyone is included
- What does homecoming mean to you?
- What does abundance mean to you?
 - Going to a friend's house and their mom gave you dinner
 - Going home means participating in the abundance that is there (family, friends, etc)
 - The Welch family, that had adopted kids, and the whole family would get up in the middle of the night for a midnight snack
 - it was an incredibly loving house.
 - Christmas in August at Yellowstone National Park & Cooke City, which has been going on ever since the Park & Mt. Republic were founded
- What are your connections to homecoming and abundance?
 - Something like the moravian candlelight Christmas
- The discipline of abundance is not to reach a constant moment where you feel abundance ALL the time
 - it's a lot of work, coordination, discipline and recognizing those moments of warm expansion
- Bob Cratchit may not feel the abundance of Christmas Present every day, but every day he is welcomed home by his loving family, all of whom practice the discipline of abundance
- In this week before Christmas,
 - as you prepare for family and friends,
 - or watch others do so
 - as you 'gird up your loins' for in-laws and difficult conversations
 - know that God's care is how we care for one another and for creation
 - and God's covenant will be fulfilled as it has been throughout time
 - Even in the midst of conflict, difficulty, exile
 - The discipline of abundance is the way of always coming home
 - And homecoming is about how and who we are with God and Christ
 - Not where we are going
- Amen