

“Free Lunch?” A sermon by Lee Ireland  
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church  
March 24, 2019, Third Sunday in Lent  
Isaiah 55: 1-9

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

It always happens when you are in the middle of something doesn't it? The phone rings, you answer, “Hello.” And a voice at the other end of the line says, “Mr. Ireland you have just won a free trip to Hawaii. You and your family have won a free seven day/six night stay at our luxury resort on Maui. Isn't that exciting?”

At that point you know you have a telemarketer on the line and you are certainly not excited! You know the offer is not really free. You'll be given a value for the vacation, certainly close to \$2500, and asked to pay some small amount to hold the vacation.

You hang up on the caller because you know what's coming and you also know “there ain't no such thing as a free lunch.”

Yet, we just heard in a reading from Isaiah. I like the Message translation, **Hey there! All who are thirsty, come to the water! Are you penniless? Come anyway – buy and eat! Come, buy your drinks, buy wine and milk. Buy without money – everything's free! Why do you spend your money on junk food, your hard-earned cash on cotton candy?**

Can't you just see it? Those folks who stand on the median as you exit the Target shopping center, who stand with a sign that says, ‘Hungry. Need food. Won't you help?’ In Isaiah's world they are all leaving Trader Joe's with grocery carts full of food, free food – leaving the grocery store with plenty of nutritious food to eat, waving at the checkers as they leave the store.

“Wait a minute,” you say! “Does God mean literally there is a free lunch – free wine and milk?” Or is the free lunch a metaphor? Metaphors connect two things not because they actually are the same, but for the sake of comparison or symbolism. For example, you don't really have any black sheep in your family unless you raise sheep that are black. In other words, is God really talking about free food or using these words to represent something else God has to offer?

I'll let you be the judge. More on this question later but just consider this scripture from Acts describing the early church and how it functioned: **Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.** (Acts 4:32)

“There ain't no such thing as a free lunch.” Or is there? I would have to say that in God's economy, there is such a thing as a free lunch. Our reading today from Isaiah explains how this can be. Continuing with the Message translation, God says: **I don't think the way you think. The way you work isn't the way I work. For as the sky soars high above earth, so the way I work surpasses the way you work and the way I think is beyond the way you think.**

“There ain't no such thing as a free lunch.” Or is there? Why is it that we continue to question, to be cynical, to doubt? I am always struck by folks who tell me they've led a good

life and hope that God will let them into heaven. The idea of earning your way to heaven permeates our society. We think if we help the poor, or if we donate something to the food bank, we'll make points with God. As my mother said, you'll get a star in your crown.

We seem to want to do something to earn something. If your friend purchases your lunch on one occasion, then you feel like you must buy lunch the next time you get together. If someone gives you a present, then you feel you must give them one in return.

But that's not how God's economy works. That's not the way God's world is arranged. God says: **I don't think the way you think. The way you work isn't the way I work. Buy without money – everything's free! Why do you spend your money on junk food, your hard-earned cash on cotton candy?** With God there is a free lunch! We only need to accept that fact.

What is it that keeps us from accepting God's generosity, God's free lunch? Is it pride? Is it habit? Is it wanting to always look good? Whatever it is, examine your thoughts this Lenten season. We often give up something for Lent or take on an additional spiritual practice. What is the motivation for this action? Is it to 'earn' favor with God? Or is it to grow closer to God and understand God's ways – to open ourselves to God's presence in our lives, to see God in a new light? I hope it's the latter.

The truth is if we order our lives according to conventional worldly wisdom, what God says in Isaiah will not make sense. But if we come and buy into God's reasoning, God's way of doing business, God's divine wisdom, then we will see how God's words in these verses make sense. We will align our lives with God's divine purposes.

God doesn't invite us into a shallow relationship or one that involves a few minutes here and there or one that you can accept only when it's convenient. God does not want a fast-food relationship. Rather, God wants a deep abiding relationship. God wants to spend time with you over a long, lavish dinner, lingering over the meal, savoring the delicious food, enjoying the conversation. God wants you to spend time with God, to develop a deep faith that comes with really knowing God. God wants the kind of time from you that you would give any pursuit that is worthy of your full attention.

Stop spending your money on cotton-candy, a food void of nutrition. Start accepting God's nutritious food! God's grace and love. Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of your sins.

What will happen to us if we do? (Again from the Message translation.) **So you'll go out in joy, you'll be led into a whole and complete life. The mountains and hills will lead the parade, bursting with song. All the trees of the forest will join the procession, exuberant with applause. (Isaiah 55:12)**

Sounds pretty exciting to me! And it's all free. Really free. You just need to accept what God has to offer. Perhaps you should tell that telemarketer about what is really free in this world.