

Sermon: Giving Up Thirst for Lent

Year C, Lent 3

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

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I don't go to Starbucks very often, but when I do, this is what I say at the counter, "I would like a decaf coffee with milk. And I don't know how to order that here." Usually that gets a laugh, and sometimes the kind person behind the counter tells me the magic incantation that will yield a decaf coffee with milk the next time.

But the reality is, I don't want a Starbucks decaf with milk. I want a Green Mountain Hazelnut decaf with a splash of skim milk, zapped in the microwave for 47 seconds in one of the Matthew Rice mugs I bought at a National Trust gift store the last time I was in Scotland. When I get to start the day the way I want, that's how it starts, with that coffee in that mug. It isn't that much different from the Starbucks in the paper cup. But it's much more satisfying.

Why do I like Green Mountain coffee better than Starbucks? Well, sure, it has something to do with not liking the taste of dark roast. And there's something maybe a little more upscale about the other people who drink Starbucks than I think of myself as. It certainly costs more than I want to pay for something I don't enjoy all that much. It's just part of how my taste buds and my upbringing and my budget come together. For someone else, for millions of someone else, all those things and more come together really differently. They love Starbucks.

Now whether you love Starbucks or Green Mountain or Sanka, I don't think any of us think, "oh, that was perfect. I never have to have another cup of coffee again." It's a pleasure, a physical pleasure for most of us, and just because we satisfy our desire for that pleasure once, we don't cross it off the list and decide we never want to experience it again.

So the first thing to notice about the two readings today is that they start with the desires for food and water. There are times when we know we are thirsty, when we are longing for water, and the water feels so good going down. There are times, like in the heart of a New England winter when our skin is so dry it feels like it will fall off in sheets, when we don't know we're dehydrated, and yet the water still feels so good going down. But no matter how aware we are of being thirsty, no matter how good the water feels going down, we will be thirsty tomorrow. It is a pleasure when we drink when we are thirsty and eat when we are hungry, but the pleasure doesn't reduce the physical reality that we need food and water to live and we will keep needing food and water.

Every day we need food and every day we need water. If somehow you think you are self contained, able to control your destiny, every day, multiple times a day, you get a blatant biological reminder that you are not all powerful, you are not in control. By yourself, you are simply not enough.

The good news, the great news, is when you attend to those needs, it's pleasurable. Sometimes it's more pleasurable than others, but whether it is Starbucks or Green Mountain or Sanka, it feels so good to drink when you are thirsty and eat when you are hungry.

We're in the heart of Lent now, on the third Sunday in Lent. We know that Lent is a time of preparation for Easter. We celebrated Carnival, Farewell to Meat, that culminated on Mardi Gras, Fat Tuesday, because we were going to enter the fasting time that began on Ash

Wednesday. There's a tradition of giving something up for Lent that many of us are familiar with. If someone asks about giving something up for Lent, chocolate comes up a lot, or other favorite foods. Sometimes people give up activities like eating out.

They're experimenting with something and usually something pretty fundamental. They are using that biological need for food and water to experience something, to get at something, in a way that they don't do the rest of the year. No one stops eating or drinking during Lent, they don't go that far. No one joins Weight Watchers just for Lent, so it's not that kind of experiment. It's something else.

When you ask them why or what that does for them, it's often hard for them to put it into words. When you press them about how that helps them prepare for Easter, they quite often give you a quiet smile and say, "It just does."

That's one of those moments where we encounter Mystery. Not a who-done-it, but a reality that our scientific, market-based, defined-by-reason operating procedure runs into from time to time. It's a place where logic and reasoning fall away, a place where even words fall away, and something just is and just does. Why did you fall in love with your spouse? How can you face going to the nursing home to not be recognized yet again? Why do you go to church most Sunday mornings? Now there are words we can pack around those answers, about love and duty and community. But in the end, the answer is something about encountering Mystery.

When most of us are hungry or thirsty, we just wander into the kitchen and solve the problem. Often times we're not even aware there is a problem. We're in front of the cabinet and then the Triscuit box is lighter and we're on to our next task. Yet for folks who are giving up something for Lent, they've built in a circuit breaker. They're taking an action that forces them to realize that they are not enough.

That's the second thing to notice about today's readings. They both point out that while we are not enough, God is more than enough. God has given us a world with food and water. God has given us a world where eating and drinking when we are hungry and thirsty is pleasurable. God has given us a world where we have enough food and water for everyone.

And I'm not just talking about here in Brookline or the United States. For a long time, I thought God was calling me to use my corporate skills to help find ways to get everyone enough food and water. Since somewhere in the middle of the 1990s, we have had enough food and clean drinking water for everyone on this planet. What we lack is effective distribution systems. We are wasting and mismanaging what we have, but we have enough.

So there is a Mystery to get in touch with. We are not enough. God is more than enough. God has given us a safe and pleasurable way to remain in contact with both those realities. Even better, we can bring more and more people into connection with God's abundance by expanding our connection to that mystery. There is security in knowing what to do when we feel that vulnerability the most acutely. If it is not hunger and thirst that remind you that you are not enough, it will be something else: you are not rich enough, smart enough, thin enough, patient enough, disciplined enough. Of course you aren't. None of us are. But God is. And the world is set up so that we can connect, multiple times a day with God's abundance if we are willing to do so. Especially if we work together to help each other remember that the Mystery is just there, waiting for us to connect.

The final thing to notice in both of today's readings is perhaps the hardest to see, because it's so fundamental. When we encounter Mystery, it's not a smooth, glassy cliff that forms a boundary beyond which we cannot go. It's not *other* than us even though it's *different* from us. When we encounter Mystery, there are hand holds that fit just our grips, there is music that only we can hear, there is something that echoes inside us. Yes, we're aware of being smaller than Mystery, but we're not diminished by it. It's more like we get set back to our real scale.

Sure, God's ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8). And thank God for that. But our souls can cling to God; God's right hand can hold us up (Psalm 63:8). This is so much more than this world and we can connect to it through God. God can connect to us. God is not beyond some boundary we, poor limited creatures that we are can never cross. God is right there connecting us to unlimited abundance, with every sip of water we take. We may not be enough for many things, but we are more than enough to connect with God.

And isn't that the Easter message? This world is not all that there is. God will connect with us despite our limitations, just as we are today. How rich a feast are we offered every day, to know that whatever our own shortcomings, we have God opening every one of us to unending love and acceptance. The glimmer of pleasure we get in our morning coffee, the spark of recognition we catch when we give up something for Lent in order to recognize the source of all pleasure, those are just tiny flickers compared to the glory God is offering us, if we just open ourselves up to the gift God has already given us.

We will always thirst in this world. But during Lent we can use thirst to recognize that we are living in an Easter world already, where our needs are already met, if we are simply willing to recognize the promise God has already fulfilled. We are not enough. God is more than enough. However limited we are, we can connect with God's abundance. By handing over our thirst during Lent, by celebrating both who created it and who will relieve it, we teach our hearts to live the Easter message, to live in the loving presence of Mystery.