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Isaiah 55:1-9

### The Greatest Offer Ever Made

Perhaps we have all received unsolicited phone calls from people who promise us a gift of some sort if we just accept it. The conversation might run something like this. *Hello, Mr. Gullible, I am happy to announce that you have won an extraordinary prize for being the 27<sup>th</sup> number on our list, an all expenses paid seven days, six nights, trip to the Bahamas.* To which we might quickly answer, *No thanks, I'm not interested.* Or, *if you just call this number to claim your gift we would like to give you a year's supply of hot dogs and hamburgers.* *No thanks, I'm not interested.* We might receive some of the most outrageous offers over the internet. About once a week I get something which my e-mail server knows to put directly into junk mail. Someone or other who has a couple million dollars of which he or she would like to give me a million because I am a trustworthy person. I just need to send my bank account information so that the deposit can be made. A lot of these attempts are apparently made from overseas. I got one a couple of times from a person who said she had been willed by her late husband a great sum of money and she would like to give some of it to a Christian person in order for that person to do good works. She just needed to know how to transfer the money to me. That would take care of the new roof expense quite nicely, wouldn't it? Apparently some people actually do fall for these bogus offers because they keep being made. But we who are not naive hang up quickly or click the delete button whenever they come our way. We know that nothing in life is free. If it is worthwhile it has a price. The more desirable it is, the higher the price might be. It is the way the world is organized. It is natural. It is the basis of societal economic health.

There is, however, one exception. It is the most valuable thing of all because it meets our greatest need of all. But no matter how hard we work or how much money we have, we can not earn it and we can not buy it. It is a gift.

On the other hand, we spend a lot of time preparing for work and earning money to purchase other things. The process starts as soon as we are old enough to walk and talk. That's when formal education begins. It's not enough anymore to begin with kindergarten, now a child must have a pre-school education if he or she is going to keep up with the other children as they go through school. The things you and I learned in

kindergarten and first grade are now learned in pre-school. If a child does not know the alphabet, colors, numbers, basic shapes, and even recognize and write his or her own name, he or she will be behind his or her classmates at the beginning and studies have indicated that the child will tend to stay behind. That is why it is so important that children of low income households have a pre-school experience equivalent to that of more well-to-do children. It is a Christian mission for us at First Church to help provide a pre-school education in our building for children from poor families in cooperation with the YMCA and the state of Connecticut School Readiness program.

We know why education is of more practical importance today than it ever was. If you want to get a good paying job, we tell our children, get a good education. And so we start putting the pressure on early. Get good grades, study hard, the world requires more skills and abilities now in order to succeed. How many hours of homework are done each night, how many battles over homework are fought in the home, how much anxiety is suffered by some students over getting a B instead of an A, let alone that endured by parents of students getting D's and C's?

And when school is over we work longer hours now. A generation or so ago the average work week was just below forty hours, now it is around forty four. A generation or so ago it was commonly held that one parent working full time was enough to provide a middle class living for the family, now the majority of households in America have two parents working full time. We spend a vast amount of our time and energy getting the ends to meet for what we want, don't we? Even necessities cost money and what's wrong with a little extra something nice now and then? There are no genuine offers to give us anything we want or even need for free— except the one thing, except the most important thing of all.

*Ho, Isaiah cries, 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 labor for that which does not satisfy? —Isaiah 55:1,2*

We might perk up our ears at the prophet's words. He could be speaking directly to us, couldn't he? We work so hard and so often for all the things we have but are we satisfied with them over the long term; perhaps distracted for a while, but not satisfied. If you are like me how often you may have asked yourself, how can I slow down? How can I trim my agenda a little bit? How can I regain control of my schedule? How can I get some time to look up at the trees and hear the birds?

Speaking for God, Isaiah goes on, *Incline your ear, and come to me; listen so that you may live. (Isaiah 55:3)* As Saint Augustine put it, *Our souls are restless (O God) until they find their rest in thee.* And Jesus quoting the Hebrew scriptures said, *Human*

*beings can not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*  
— Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4

*Come*, Isaiah declares, *everyone who thirsts*: Come, he might add, everyone who thirsts for love, who thirsts for acceptance, who thirsts for forgiveness, who thirsts for meaning, who thirsts for security, who thirsts for reliable friendship, who thirsts for unconditional love, who thirsts for God. Come, and quench your thirst for God. Faith costs nothing. The practice of prayer costs nothing. Worship costs nothing. Accepting divine forgiveness costs nothing. Accepting your humanness costs nothing. Forgiving yourself costs nothing. Getting right with God costs nothing. Starting anew from the inside out, feeling loved and cared for no matter what, costs nothing. The fulfillment of the deep need for closeness to God, for spiritual peace, costs nothing— and yet we turn from it as if we can't afford it or it takes too much effort or too much time. Even the organized church, which justifiably concerns itself so often with budgets and property and salary and program expense, might need to be reminded that the ultimate purpose of it all costs nothing.

The great human problem may be that we don't know what the problem is. Many of us really are materially prosperous enough. We really do have quite enough things so that we could be comfortable and happy if the spiritual part of us was comfortable and happy. But what do we do, we spend more and more time trying to get more and more things, or try to put more and more money away, but are never quite satisfied because our dissatisfaction has little to do with the amount and quality of the things we own or with our level of certainty about our financial future. Our discontent is within our deepest hearts, what the Bible and religion call the soul, where feeling secure and at peace must begin, and where they must begin with faith in God, or we will never feel secure and at peace at all.

At least if we accurately identify what it is that we still need we might not be as likely to try and satisfy the need by getting more of what we already have, and when acquiring more things still doesn't work, try to get even more. What an incessant frustration! What is that definition of insanity going around, to keep on doing the same thing, over and over, expecting different results?

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.* —Revelation 3:12

*Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset over so many things, but only one is needed.* —Luke 10:41

The Great God of the Universe extends to us the greatest offer ever made. It's the only offer ever made that sounds too good to be true, but is true. It costs nothing. It is

the free gift of God's acceptance and forgiveness and help to build a life filled with the peace of faith, certain hope, and the joy of unconditional love. The offer hasn't come by telephone or internet or by someone we can not trust. It has come to us through Jesus Christ, God's own Son. It is what every person most needs, rich or poor, educated or illiterate, successful in the world or not. And all anyone needs to do, all anyone can do, in order to have it, is to say, *Yes, I'll take it!* Or are you crazy?