

November 22, 2020
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Title: A Well of Thanksgiving
Text : Isaiah 12



This Thursday is set aside in our nation as a day of Thanksgiving. But, it's still 2020. 2020 challenges everything this year even our spirit of Thanksgiving. This week our nation hit a high in Covid-19 infections, deaths and hospitalization. The loved ones of more than 250,000 people are grieving. Our nation is experiencing the worst transition of leadership after an election in our democracy. Systemic and Individual Racism that has been ignored for decades now is in the spotlight. Church doors have been closed for nine months! Personal losses and crisis that are not even in the news banners weigh heavy on our hearts. We are in a season that feels more like a nightmare, a season of lament and fear instead of a season of Giving Thanks.

In Sheryl Sandberg's book about women in leadership, she notes, "Fear is at the root of many barriers women face. Fear of not being liked, fear of making the wrong choice, fear of drawing negative attention, fear of overreaching. Fear of being judged. Fear of failure. And the holy trinity of fear: the fear of being a bad mother/wife/daughter." So the question is asked, "what would you do if you weren't afraid?"

I know fear is our greatest enemy, but I don't think women have the corner on that market. Fear is the paralyzing force regardless of gender. Maybe that's why we hear 'fear not' over 100 times in scripture. Fear prevents abundant life; fear prevents movement forwards; so the psalmist of First Isaiah proclaims, "I will trust, and I will not be afraid." Listen with me to this Song of Isaiah from the 12th chapter.

You will say on that day: I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, and you comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might; God is my salvation.

May we hear what God's Spirit says to us today.

One way that scripture stories move from fear to thanksgiving is through remembrance. When people remember they have survived tough times before, we draw strength and courage from the past success. That's what our scriptures give to us. They remind us how people survived the hardest of times because of God's provision. Storytellers, prophets, psalmist, historians, rabbi's remind the congregation: God is salvation. For the Hebrew people, 'salvation' is not a word referencing pearly gates of the afterlife; salvation is in the now. Salvation is escape from slavery and oppression; salvation is food during famine; salvation is courage to march through the wilderness; salvation is land to grow food. Salvation is wholeness. Leaders bring calm by remembering past salvation and also by dreaming big and projecting the dream over and over until it has life of its own.

Isaiah was a prophet 8th centuries before Christ. He was speaking during a time of national crisis. The news headlines crawling across the screen as Isaiah preached would have said things about foreign invaders and political instability and collapse of political allies and a

crisis along the borders. Isaiah sings in the midst of chaos, destruction and uncertainty not unlike what we know today. Isaiah approaches the congregation and says, 'let's learn a new song.' It's a song of thanksgiving- not lament. We are going to learn to sing this song of Thanksgiving because We are going to need it. We are going to learn it now and we are going to rehearse it. We will let it sink into our bones and become part of who we are. We will sing it every morning until it is who we are. Isaiah teaches a song of vision. It's a dream of hope expressed before the reality of it is ever experienced. It's a song of freedom the enslaved sing believing that their great-grandchildren will live in freedom. It's a spiritual song for God's provision that they trust will be realized someday. It's more than a wish upon a star. These vision songs become an energy of the present. Proclaiming the preferred future is putting out into the universe the conclusion of the crisis. It is envisioning a new reality with so much confidence and trust that the fears of today dissolve. The future hope becomes today's reality.

Isaiah gives a beautiful metaphor to teach how this trust comes about-to teach how the vision becomes reality. Here's the rest of Isaiah's song:

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say on that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on God's name; make known God's deeds among the nations; proclaim that God's name is exalted. Sing praises to the Lord, for God has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Most of us aren't too familiar with drawing water from a well. It is a powerful image. We turn a faucet and water comes out - no big deal. Drawing water up from a well as the ancient peoples did was not so easy. Water is heavy. The clay pots they lowered into the well were heavy. They bumped into the sides of the well and threatened to crack open as they lowered. They spilled and splashed when raised. Dry feet got muddy, and clothes got wet. Muscles strained to carry the precious life-essential liquid in earthen jars. Drawing life-giving water from the well of wholeness is a metaphor that invites us to work- to put for effort. Drawing life-giving water for our soul is sinking down deep into the well of Divine Presence. It's claiming the energy that can nourish our soul and calm our fears by deepening our spiritual practices like prayer, meditation, and song. It isn't looking out there for the next superstar to save us, it is going within to the source of a well of wholeness that is the ground of our being.

When we dive deeply into the well of God's presence, in silence and prayer, and spiritual reading, and communion, in journaling, in nature walks, with spiritual companionships, our fears dissolve and genuine thanksgiving bubbles up and overflows. May you draw deep from the wells of Divine Love. May you live without fear. May we sing praises of joy and thanksgiving this day- and on this Thursday -and everyday as we awake remembering our deliverance from struggles in the past, proclaiming the vision of God's preferred future, and trusting in the presence of God today, within, around and through all.

May we give thanks. Amen.