

Service Date—August 16, 2020  
Sermon Text—Isaiah 55:1-3

When it comes to retail sales and consumer spending, the Thanksgiving/Christmas season is the most important time of the year—with Black Friday, Small Business Saturday and Cyber Monday. What would you say is the second most important time of year for retailers? If you said back to school time, you are right. That is why retailers and merchants do a great deal of advertising at this time of year. You might have seen some ad papers announcing special back to school sales, maybe they came in the newspaper or to your inbox or popped up on your computer screen. Those ads cry out for your attention and invite you to go to the store or get on line to shop. They are not unique to our country or to our time. Similar scenes are played out in market places all over the world each day. In open-air markets the vendors call and cry out for business. They come with their goods, set up shop and as people pass by they cry out—hawking their produce or merchandise hoping to make a sale. Indeed, already at the time of the prophet Isaiah people were used to hearing merchants cry out for their attention trying to attract their business. The portion of Isaiah's prophecy that is before us today advertises a great sale, but this sale is not at Target, Best Buy, or Kohls, this is God's Great Sale. In the Word of God before us Isaiah urges us to Shop God's Great Sale and he tells us that God has what we really need, and at a price we can all afford.

### I. Shop God's Great Sale, He has what we really need

Back to school sales are nothing new. But this year's back to school shopping season is different from any in recent memory. People just don't know what the school is going to look like this fall. Parents have to wonder if their students will be in the classroom for in person classes or at home learning virtually. It makes a difference because what you need for each option is quite different. If the kids are in the classroom they will need new jeans and polos and the latest superhero lunchbox. If they are at home they will need new pajamas, laptop computers and printers. So what do you do? The decision is not easy for parents and students because who knows what will happen when school starts? So you look at the ad papers and the abundance of merchandise, and wonder if you need it?

We don't have any problems like that as we hear our Lord cry out to attract our attention to his great sale. Like a merchant at a busy marketplace he calls out in our reading: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk...Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me that your soul may live." The Lord is addressing some absolutely fundamental needs with his offer, and that is not only because he offers food and water—which are at the very base of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. Our Lord is not addressing physical hunger and thirst, nor is he simply offering bread and beverages to those who pass by. That is clear from the fact that what the Lord offers will satisfy not just the body's hunger and thirst, but the soul. The Lord's cry through Isaiah is addressed to the spiritually thirsty and the hungry, to those feeling empty and unsatisfied. The Lord saw the same kind of spiritual hunger and thirst during the days of his ministry on earth in the Samaritan woman who was looking for something to quench her thirst, and in the multitudes he saw coming to him harassed and helpless "like sheep without a shepherd." Jesus issued the same kind of invitation in our Gospel reading inviting the weary and burdened to come to him for rest. He saw souls burdened with sin and guilt, weary of carrying the

burden and weary of trying to be rid of it, weary of seeking in vain to find peace and rest, calm and contentment.

Do you know the feeling? You don't have to be a parent wondering about whether to buy new pajamas for your student to wear for school at home, or the latest superhero lunchbox for your student to take to school, to feel worn down and tired. You may have fears about your kids going back to school and picking up some sickness or bringing it home to the rest of the family. You may have concerns about your own work and how to balance that with the needs of your children especially if they end up being at home again. You don't even have to be involved with school to know anxiety, loneliness, and exhaustion these days. You just need to be living with 24/7 coverage of a pandemic of panic and fear. So what do you do? Shop the sales? Is there anything in those sale papers with all their pictures and pages that will quench your spiritual longing and bring peace and rest to your soul? Some people think so. They did already at Isaiah's time. Listen to him.

"Why do you spend money for that which does not nourish and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" Already in Isaiah's day the Lord watched as people ignored his cry and invitation to hear his Word and draw water to drink from the wells of salvation. Few shopped at his sale, few found the peace and joy and contentment he offered. Jeremiah saw it too, in his day. Through him the Lord said: "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." These were people who sensed that something was missing in their lives. Their lives were empty; they lacked contentment—nothing satisfied, nothing filled the void, the holes in their souls. They worked and sweated and struggled, but still nothing. They tried to fill up that hole in their soul. Maybe a little more work, a few more activities, bring home more stuff. But still life remained empty; their homes and closets and lives were full of stuff, but always in the end it was unsatisfying. So it still is today. People are thirsty, looking and longing for something that will bring calm and contentment to their lives but looking in the wrong place.

To what extent do we share that feeling? To what extent does God look at our lives and ask as he does in our reading: "Why do you spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy?" To whatever extent it is, it is because Satan has managed to distract us from the One who can give us true rest and peace, the God who cries out: "Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare." Have we gotten caught up in the notion that happiness and meaning are to be found in the treasures and pleasures of this world? What does the way we budget our time and income and energy say? Has Satan made our lives a maddening chase for happiness that manages to stay just out of reach like the rabbit stays just ahead of the greyhounds? Then let us confess our sin, our idolatry. For this is idolatry: to look for and expect from created things what only our Creator can give us. Only he who said, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened," can give true peace and rest to the soul; to look for that from anyone or anything other than God is idolatry; a transgression of the first and greatest Commandment of God's law. A sin which calls down on us God's wrath and punishment; so let us confess our sins and hear God's gracious invitation: "Come, you who are thirsty." And know that the one who issues that invitation is the One who renounced the pleasures and treasures of this world and relied upon his God. He is the One who in love laid down his life to free us from sin and to bring us salvation with its blessings of forgiveness, life, peace and rest, calm and confidence and contentment.

What lovely pictures the Lord uses for the blessings of salvation! He calls it water and wine and milk. As water that refreshes the weary and thirsty soul, so as we listen to our Savior as he speaks to us in his Word he leads us like a shepherd beside the still waters and restores us spiritually.

As we bend our ears to his Word the Savior gives us the Word that is like wine that according to Psalm 104 “gladdens the heart.” Think of Psalm 46 with its opening description of a world in tumult: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.” A frightening picture and yet what are God’s people doing amid the chaos? The Psalm continues: “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God.” Like wine that gladdens the heart, so is the Word with its promises of our powerful God’s abiding presence and help.

And milk. Milk nourishes and makes strong, so St. Peter urges God’s people in his first letter to be “like new born babies (craving) pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.” And so as we come to God’s great sale to “buy” the blessings of salvation without money or cost we are strengthened to face the challenges of each new day in this world of sin.

As you page through the ads these days, remember God’s Great Sale, shop there, he has what we really need; and he offers it

## II. At a price we can afford

The ad papers announce that merchants have slashed their prices for their back to school sales. Even so, if you have to buy supplies for both in person school and virtual classes, you may be wondering if you can afford it. Not so with the Lord’s great sale. He says: “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” How much will the goods our God offers, the things we really need—the blessings for our soul like forgiveness of sins, joy, peace, consolation, contentment in this life and everlasting life in heaven—how much will those cost? Nothing. They are free. Come, buy wine, without money and without cost. What kind of shopping is this? You fill up your cart and go—no stopping at the register to pay. No money, no cost. Isn’t it interesting that salvation from sin and all the blessings of salvation were freely offered in the Old Testament as well as in the New. We are used to hearing that “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord,” in Romans. But Isaiah said the same thing. It has always been that sinners have been saved by grace through faith and this never was from themselves not by their works but was always a gift of God.

So why does our Lord use the picture of “buying” if no money is required and the blessings are free? The idea of “buying” these free gifts stresses the urgency with which we need to pursue these blessings and importance of obtaining them. Just think how we react when something we need goes on sale. We might hear of the bargain and head right out the door to get to the store while supplies last. Or boot up the computer to put in our order. In the same way the Lord wants us to see that he offers the one thing needful—the salvation of our souls and the blessings that come with it.

So if we don’t buy these blessings with money or effort, how do we “buy” these blessings that will satisfy our souls and provide spiritual rest and peace? We just listen. “Listen, listen to me,” the

Lord says, "and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare." These are blessings that come to us as we sit and listen to the Word of God. How different that is from the "secrets" our world has for finding peace and obtaining rest. Do you ever listen to the radio? I do and it seems like what always on are shows these shows about wellness and self-help. One is called "Intelligence for your health," another is called "Intelligence for your life." I think the hosts are Jon Tesh and maybe Connie Sellecca. Anyway, they have all these secrets for physical and mental wellness. And as I listen I hear about everything they tell you to eat and avoid, how much to sleep and how to get it, what to think and even what expression to have on your face. As I listen to them I just get exhausted. I think how weary I would become trying to do everything they say; trying to be sure I am focusing right and smiling correctly and thinking positively enough. I listen to all their secrets for wellness and I get more worn out and anxious. So it will always be with those who think they can find salvation from sin and its consequences by themselves and by what they do. St. Paul says: "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the Law.'" That curse that all who rely on observing the law live under is not only eternal death in hell, but the curse of chasing after peace and spiritual rest and calm and contentment but ending up exhausted and empty like a gerbil worn out from madly running on his wheel but never getting anywhere.

How different it is with our Lord. He just says: "Listen." He says; take your place with Mary of Bethany at the Savior's feet. Jesus is telling us that he gives us peace and rest and he is telling us to sit and let him lift the burden and trust him to provide and care for you. Why is listening so important? Because faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.

How can we be sure the Lord will truly and freely provide these blessings? Listen. The Lord says: "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my unfailing kindnesses promised to David." To understand what that means remember how David wanted to build a house for God, but the Lord said no, your son Solomon will do it. At that time God made a glorious promise to David that when his days were over one of his descendants would rule in his place forever. That was the promise of a Savior, the same promise given earlier to Abraham and before that to Adam and Eve. It was an unfailing promise. About a thousand years after David died an angel messenger of God appeared to a young lady named Mary in Nazareth and said: "Don't be afraid...You will be with child and give birth to a son. You are to give him the name Jesus. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David." The time had come for God to put into effect his covenant of grace into effect. God's Son came into the world in our human flesh from the house and line of David to live and die as the substitute for sinners. He came to put into effect God's covenant of grace according to which God's promised: "I will forgive your wickedness and remember your sins no more." He came to do that at an incredible price—his life offered on the cross. Our salvation; it was bought at a price—the precious blood of Christ. If God prepared such a gift at such price, how will he not also give us all things? Trust him. Listen to his Word. Let him feed your faith and calm your fears.

Back to school sales are everywhere. Those ads seem to be working—sales are brisk. How will it be with God's great sale? He has what we really need, at a price we can afford—in his Word and Sacrament he freely offers a banquet of priceless spiritual blessings. Let us come and listen and eat what is good so that our souls may delight in the richest of fare. Amen.

