

**Plymouth Congregational Church of Fort Wayne, UCC**  
October 15, 2017

**“Banquet Blessings”**

*“On this mountain the Lord of hosts  
will make for all peoples a feast of rich food ...  
It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God ...  
This is the Lord for whom we have waited.”  
(Isaiah 25:6, 9)*

**PRELUDE**

For a dozen years or so we have set aside this Sunday, the third Sunday in October, as a day of celebration for our church’s involvement with the ministry of Foods Resource Bank (FRB).

The mission of Foods Resource Bank  
is quite simple:  
to help families in the most remote  
and vulnerable areas of the world  
grow their own food.

This mission is committed to transforming  
families and communities  
from scarcity to self-sufficiency;  
from malnutrition and chronic hunger  
to sustainable food security.

There exists a watchdog organization called  
Charity Navigator, which rates various charitable  
entities to determine if they are operating with  
efficiency and effectiveness consistent with their  
purpose. Charity Navigator calls itself a  
**“Guide to Intelligent Giving.”**

Foods Resource Bank ranks among the highest rated  
by Charity Navigator, earning 4 stars with regard to  
its financial accountability and transparency.

This is what we want from our partner organizations,  
and FRB is fully compliant.

FRB is not a large charity as compared to some.  
It works through 50 (or so) growing projects,  
in over 30 different countries.

The two projects we have most recently supported  
are located in the Dominican Republic Batayes  
and in Uganda, Teso.

Dominican Republic shares half of the  
Caribbean island of Hispaniola with Haiti.  
The Batayes is an area largely populated by  
Haitian immigrants working in the DR;  
according to FRB the Haitians living in the DR,  
have **“historically been among the poorest and  
most discriminated against people ... in the DR.**  
A month ago, Hurricane Irma impacted the island,  
as it did so many others. So life there is  
complicated and challenging.

Uganda. It is located in east central Africa,  
on the north shore of Lake Victoria;  
it is comparable in size to the state of Oregon,  
with about 10 times as many people.  
Teso is an eastern region of Uganda,  
bordering Kenya.

Uganda Teso is said to be the  
**“National Headquarters of Hunger.”**  
It is a region whose once stable economy  
has been devastated by war, the blight of  
its traditional crop, and climate change.  
When it rains, it pours/floods; and  
when it doesn't, there is drought.  
So life there is complicated and challenging.

I want to express thanks to our FRB steering committee for their efforts in keeping us connected to this good work. And I thank all who have contributed, or who will contribute, to these important global mission endeavors.

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Our lesson this morning comes to us from Isaiah the prophet.

Isaiah is both a person who once lived in the 8th century BCE, and the name affixed to a school of thought as contained within the scroll that bears Isaiah's name, material that spans two or more centuries.

The 25th chapter appears to be a production of the school, rather than the school's namesake.

It has been said

**“The prophets voice a restlessness about social reality that bespeaks the restless rule of God.”**

The voice of the prophets works to invest social realities with new possibilities grounded in God's design and will for the creation.

What is unique about the prophets?

**“they are persons who were capable of transcending themselves, in order to be available for a purpose larger than their own, and therefore to voice a message other than their own”** (see the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, p. 862-863).

This, I suggest, is an important dimension and understanding of our Christian faith – we hope and pray to **“be available for a purpose larger than our own.”**

Larger than our own as individuals.  
Larger than our own as an institution,  
as a church.

Faith serves purpose in the only reality where life is capable of flourishing,  
the reality of God.

In chapter 25 of Isaiah we have a **“tale of two cities.”** The first city, once upon a time strong and secure,  
has fallen into ruin.

It serves as a city no more.  
God has judged this city  
and found it wanting.

We don't have an exact time or location of this city; it could be any city – once powerful and prideful, but that devolved. It didn't, or couldn't, sustain itself.

The song of the prophet continues, praising God who has proven a defender and protector of the poor. God has been a refuge for many who suffered, who were in need of shelter from the blast of the ruthless, the self-concerned, the unconcerned.

We encounter, then, a second city, a **“mountain”** really – that God intends for all peoples. On this promontory – a city is chartered; God has acted in order to save and redeem the people.

The imagery is rich with abundance.

It is a feast –  
    with plenty available,  
        with no more neglect,  
            no more insecurity,  
no more objection  
    to what God desires,  
no more fears, no more tears.  
No more death.

It will be said on that day:  
My God, we've waited long for this.  
Let us rejoice and be glad,  
    let us rejoice in this salvation.

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Three quick thoughts on our lesson,  
and how it serves us this morning.

First ... the lesson introduces the theme of  
judgment; it is what one source called a  
“**recital of punishment and restoration.**”

Abraham Joshua Heschel, in his monumental  
work, *The Prophets*, said there is only one main issue  
in all the prophetic literature of our Bible – that being  
Divine judgment on human conduct.  
“**All else is marginal**” (see *The Prophets*, p. 171).

All else, as marginal, includes  
politics, warfare, economic activities.

All else, as marginal, includes  
our keen interest in victory/defeat;  
the acquisition and protection and preservation of wealth;  
our drive to be “successful” as success is measured  
    in the world.

What is central –  
our stewardship; our administration  
of what God has entrusted to us;  
our demonstration of what  
God has instructed us.

What is central – have we behaved,  
have we maintained fidelity to the  
covenant God has initiated with us;  
or have we withdrawn into self concerns,  
and taken refuge in systems of our own making?

What is central –  
are we available for a purpose  
larger than their own?  
In Heschel's mind,  
**“Attachment to God” translates for the prophet  
into involvement “with humanity”** (Heschel, p. 172).  
And the judgment from which we are not immune  
is based upon our involvement with the God who is  
wanting and working to redeem.

So the simple question comes:  
are we taking care of each other?  
Are we taking care of each other,  
in a spiritual sense;  
in a literal sense; in a planetary sense.

It was quite disappointing this past week  
to learn that the U.S. was withdrawing as an  
active member from UNESCO – the United  
Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural  
Organization.

UNESCO was created to advance the cause  
of global international peace. It serves to  
promote knowledge and understanding and  
appreciation of our differences.

**That since wars begin in the minds of men,  
it is in the minds of (humanity) that the  
defenses of peace must be constructed;**

**That ignorance of each other's ways and lives  
has been a common cause, throughout the history of  
(humanity), of that suspicion and mistrust between  
the peoples of the world through which their  
differences have all too often broken into war ...**

I'm not sure what good comes with withdrawal.  
I'm not sure what good comes with being  
uninvolved. I'm certain we are not doing all  
we can with what we have to make such  
institutions work.

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A second thought I'd like to draw to your attention.

Isaiah 25 - the lesson is filled with ancient vision and wisdom.  
The lesson identifies as a problem for our humanity  
a shroud, a veil, an impairment that is cast over our lives  
Is this a shroud of ignorance, a veil of indifference;  
a condition of impairment that has us rather consistently  
acting in ways contrary to our nature, so that we fall short  
of being our neighbor's keepers?

Neighbor, as once defined by Ambrose Bierce  
(*The Devil's Dictionary*), **"One whom we are  
commanded to love as ourselves, and who  
does all he knows how to make us disobedient."**

Whatever is driving our self-destructive lives,  
in Isaiah 25 it gets swallowed up. Death is  
consumed. Death is wrapped by life.

Curious. The commentaries speak of this  
"swallowing up of death" as an idea

originally found in Canaanite mythology  
(see *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. V, , p. 304).

If so, then the people liberated out of Egypt,  
making their way to the promised land,  
adopted to some degree the hopes and dreams  
of the native peoples.

They not only adopted it; they also developed it,  
and worked it, and prayed it, seeking fidelity  
with the restless rule of God. In the school of  
Isaiah, it becomes an inclusive, expanded vision  
of God working on your behalf, and the behalf  
of all people, so that the “feast” is for all nations,  
signaling a new era of peace and salvation.

Our charge - in church - is to maintain that  
hope and vision.

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A third thought.

It is said that William Booth,  
founder of the Salvation Army,  
would instruct his recruits:  
**“If you can't cry over the city,  
we can't use you”**  
(see *Cities - Mission's New Frontier*,  
by R. Greenway & T. Monsma, p. 249).

The General seems to have understood a most  
valuable lesson in the grand scheme of things.  
God is always looking for help, soliciting followers  
who have a heart for the redemptive work God  
requires of us today.

That work is about food, and water;  
that work is about providing for basic health care;



that work is about building buildings,  
not for some, but for all to have  
opportunity and access  
in which to live their dreams.

God has need of us, and use of our lives.  
With our offerings - let us aspire to make  
glad the city of God; in spirit with Isaiah,  
in sync with Jesus, may we rejoice in the  
banquet blessings of God, and rest content  
in peace and joy that God makes possible.

May it be so for each and all of us this  
day, for the blessing of life on earth,  
and for the glory of the God who has called  
all worlds into being.

Amen.

*(Sermons are typically composed in haste,  
for the demands of the day are many;  
so be charitable as you read; and remember:  
the contents of this sermon have not been edited  
and may or may not have been a part of its public presentation)*