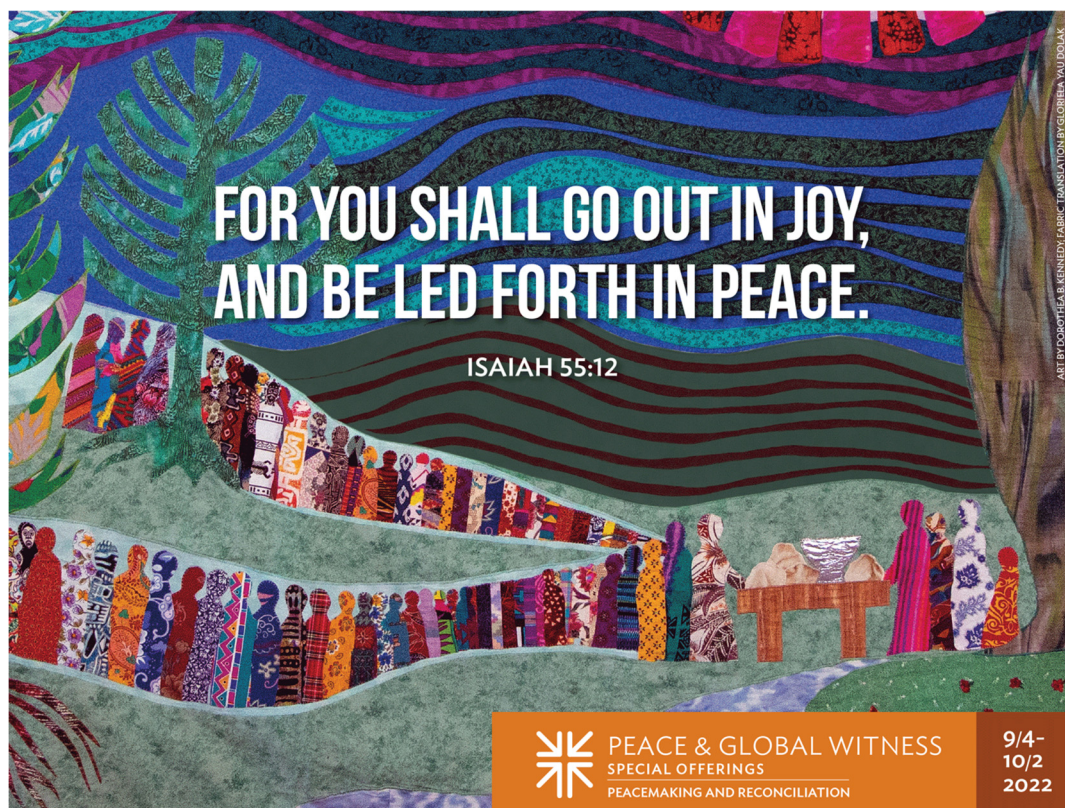


# *Go Out in Joy, Led Forth in Peace*

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



## **Prayer of Illumination**

Since we do not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from your mouth,  
make us hunger for this heavenly food,  
that it may nourish us today in the ways of eternal life;  
through Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven.  
Amen.

## **Scripture: Isaiah 55:1-13 (NRSV)**

Hear, everyone who thirsts;  
come to the waters;  
and you who have no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price.

<sup>2</sup> Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread  
and your earnings for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food.

<sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to me;  
listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,  
my steadfast, sure love for David.

<sup>4</sup> See, I made him a witness to the peoples,  
a leader and commander for the peoples.

<sup>5</sup> Now you shall call nations that you do not know,  
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,  
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,  
for he has glorified you.

<sup>6</sup> Seek the Lord while he may be found;  
call upon him while he is near;

<sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake their way  
and the unrighteous their thoughts;  
let them return to the Lord,

that he may have mercy on them,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

<sup>8</sup> For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

<sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

<sup>10</sup> For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven  
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

<sup>11</sup> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose  
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

<sup>12</sup> For you shall go out in joy  
and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall burst into song,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

<sup>13</sup> Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;  
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle,  
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,  
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

## SERMON – Go Out in Joy, Led Forth in Peace

Our sense of taste is unique in that it incorporates all of the other senses: the smell of food cooking in the kitchen, the touch of the food in our mouths, the sight of a steaming or juicy meal, and the sound of it crunching in our mouths. The human tongue has about 10,000 taste buds that live about 7-10 days, with new ones replacing the old. But after age 45 our ability to taste diminishes.

**Taste** is probably the most **social** of the **five senses**.

- A “companion” is literally defined as someone we break bread with.
- We like to eat together more than alone.
- When we talk we “**chew the cud**.”
- When someone looks concerned, we ask “*what’s eating at you?*”

In our marriages, families, and churches we’ve got to recover good old fashioned:

- **Deipnosophy**, “the art of table conversation.”

Studies show table talk at the family table is good for both our physical and emotional health. In times of disagreement, we also need to keep talking to each other at the Lord’s Table and refrain from food fights.

There was a kindergarten teacher that decided to have a show and tell time for her students. The children were to bring things from home that represented their religion. Benjamin said, “I’m Jewish—and this is a Star of David.” Catherine said, “I’m Catholic—and this is a rosary.” It came to be Little Bobby’s turn, “I’m Presbyterian—and *this* is a casserole.” ☺ That’s not bad theology. Jesus’ ministry has been described as “eating good food with bad people.”

Jesus cared about taste—he always wanted to make sure people were fed and listened to. The Lord’s Supper—Holy Communion reminds us that Jesus does this for us—and we’re in turn to feed and listen to others in Christ’s name.

Our passage from Isaiah this morning is a dinner invitation. An invitation to partake of the abundant life that God freely offers. The people of Israel are in exile when this is written. Their stomachs are growling from hunger. They’re thirsty. Their morale is down. They are losing hope for the future. Barely holding on. And they’re at a crossroad: They have been given a green light to return from exile back home to Jerusalem—but they’re finding themselves paralyzed with

fear. The prison door is open, but they're not sure about leaving the security of their jail cell. *Will they remain in the familiarity of captivity? Or venture into the uncertainty of the Land of Promise?*

As the pandemic recedes, we're in a similar situation, this has been our exile. Its effects are hard to shake off. We feel the pinch of inflation—less food for more money. We feel the pain each time we fill up at the gas station. Products are on back order. Some of our 2.5 year pandemic habits are hard to break: isolation, staying in, fear, re-establishing regular church participation, an "I can't do this" mentality.

And so God is saying to Israel and to us—

You can leave your exile in joy, you can go forth in peace, because I have redeemed you—you're free. Just step out of your cage.

God offers abundance to our scarcity: *You who are broke—don't worry—come buy and eat. Buy wine and milk without money and without cost.* Enjoy God's heavenly smorgasbord—all you can eat—for free! Don't settle for anything less.

God cares about the hungry. In fact, we encounter God when we enter into relationship with the hungry. Clothing the naked and feeding the hungry is outfitting and feeding Jesus. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, or if you're from Israel or Istanbul—the eternal covenant of the abundant life is offered to *all*, to the hungry. So God is coaxing us, saying over and over: *Come, come, come... Listen, listen. Give ear and come to me.* Open up wide and I'll satisfy your hunger and thirst. I've got just what you need. Just give up your tired and faulty presumptions. Accept my new perspective. See with the eyes of faith all my unseen realities and yet-to-be revealed possibilities.

God is offering a choice to us: stay in the rut of unbelief OR...go forward in faith. Often God's ways only seem intelligible **after** we step out in faith. So open yourself to holy imagination:

- *Cast off despair.*
- *Put on my joy.*
- *Exchange your loneliness for my refreshed relationship.*

Step across the threshold of God's kingdom: Take in the view of God's new environment— he'll take your thorns and thistles and transform them into evergreen trees. In faith, move from death to life, anxiety to peace, from the old to the new, from need to fullness, thirst to refreshment. *"You will go out in joy and move forward in peace."*

Trust God at his word. And if you're not feeling it, seeing it, or tasting it, ask God to give you the desire to desire his abundant life. Pray for his peaceable kingdom to come—*on earth as it is in heaven.*

With God, both his words and actions speak loud and clear. We just have to admit our ways aren't working. I had a moment like this in my car this week. I've found in my mid-life years I cry more. And it feels good. I was just crying in my car, "God, I need you so bad. I can't do this. You can, I can't."

"God my ways aren't your ways, my thoughts aren't your thoughts." Let's do it your way because my way isn't getting me anywhere. It's a dead-end road."

I'll be honest. The struggle is still there. Challenges haven't disappeared, but I felt just a little freer to keep moving ahead. A little sprout of hope appeared in the cracks. I took a few steps out of the open jail cell door. You see, God freely, abundantly, and generously forgives. Mercy upon mercy upon mercy is poured out. We can take God at his word, which is effective. It accomplishes his plans and designs for us. We've just got to **have faith and keep the faith**.

*So... how does God's word taste to you?* Is it awful tasting, but good for you—something like broccoli or medicine? Does God's word taste past its expiration date? —kind of like moldy bread or curdled milk? Is it bland —like unsalted pretzels or sodium-free soup? Or is it very rich, like gourmet food that you savor every bite? "Listen carefully to me," says the Lord, "and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food."

Pray that God would give you a healthy, spiritual appetite. Let God fortify and fill you up with the abundant life, so you can go forth in joy and head home in peace.



Like Jesus, our food is to do the will of the Father who sent us. As Jesus fed the multitudes, so do we. What we need is not only food for thought, but food for action. The Scriptures tell us, *"Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."*

One of the ways we give glory to God is by giving others a taste, a sampling of the heavenly life God has given us. We graciously extend hospitality: *"Taste and see that the Lord is good."* We invite others to a taste test. The Spanish word for taste is **gusto**. Let's live out our faith with **gusto**, while also making sure we don't leave a bad taste in other's mouths by being overbearing. And finally, let's not forget to say grace, giving thanks to God before each meal, praying for our daily bread and manna from heaven—Jesus Christ.

And so Immanuel, as we come to the Lord's Table, as brothers and sisters in the family of God, let's offer a blessing for the meal that our Host, Jesus Christ, has generously prepared for us—and for the world.

Amen.

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