

“Imagining God’s Abundance”

Series: Book of Isaiah: Learning Trust



Scripture: Isaiah 55:1-13 & Matthew 14:13-21

Rev. Rob Spach

February 8, 2026

In our lesson from Isaiah, the prophet speaks to people experiencing profound deprivation in the shadow of the Babylonian exile. Because their ancestors turned their backs on God’s ways, the holy city of Jerusalem was destroyed. The temple lay in ruins. Families were torn from their land and relocated by imperial force. Exile meant hunger, insecurity, and indignity. They were looked down on as foreigners. They were in a spiritual crisis, yes, but also a crisis of economics, culture, and self-understanding. Would they lose the identity and faith that were their heritage? Would they assimilate into a culture that prized wealth and domination over love and justice?

In the midst of this deprivation, God speaks a word of abundance. Isaiah cries out, “Hear, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!” (Isaiah 55:1). It is an astonishing invitation—not after things improve, not once the people prove themselves, but right in the middle of uncertain times.

Matthew’s Gospel takes up this same thread. Jesus encounters people who are hurting and hungry. From the start of his ministry, Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God: a way of being in community shaped by a vision and values that seem upside down. The poor are blessed. Prisoners are set free. The meek and the peacemakers are lifted up as examples to follow. When Jesus looks at the crowd, he sees both their spiritual longing and their physical need, and he is moved with compassion. The Greek word used here is “*splagchnon*”, related to our word “spleen.” It describes a feeling that comes from deep within, a compassion that is visceral, actually gut-wrenching.

As evening approaches, the disciples respond in what feels like a reasonable, even responsible way. This is a deserted place. Resources are limited. Scarcity is real. “Send them away,” they say. Jesus looks at the hungry crowd and replies, “You give them something to eat” (Matthew 14:16). The disciples object—five loaves and two fish are clearly not enough. Yet this story invites us into the mystery of what happens when what we have is offered, blessed, and shared. Jesus says, “Bring what you have to me.” He tells the crowd to sit down on the grass. “Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled.” In God’s economy, what appears to be scarcity becomes abundance.

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Isaiah’s word to the exiles carries this same promise. It is a prophetic declaration that God’s covenantal faithfulness has not been exhausted by human failure or imperial violence. God does not ration grace according to merit or worthiness, Isaiah insists, but gives freely and extravagantly. At the same time, this invitation isn’t shallow or sentimental. “Seek the Lord while he may be found... let the wicked forsake their way.” Grace here is active. It calls for turning, reorientation, lives aligned with God’s abundance, love, and justice rather than with the cramped, fearful logic of scarcity.

Both Isaiah and Matthew hold physical and spiritual hunger together, refusing to separate what God has joined. We do not live by bread alone—but we do, in fact, need bread. God cares about empty stomachs, about bodies worn down by illness, fear, and exclusion. And God also cares about meaning, hope, forgiveness, and the longing for dignity and belonging.

This matters for us today. We live in a nation of immense wealth alongside persistent need. Children go to school hungry. Families struggle to afford healthcare. Communities like Minneapolis wrestle with grief and disruption connected to failures of trust and accountability. Again and again, our shared life is shaped by policies and practices rooted more in fear or avarice than in confidence that there is enough care, enough safety, enough possibility for flourishing to go around.

Recently, some voices have warned against what they call “toxic empathy”—the idea that caring deeply about the suffering of others, especially those they deem undeserving, is naïve or even harmful. Scripture speaks differently. The Bible doesn’t caution us against excessive compassion. It consistently invites us toward deeper “*splagchnon*”, deeper gut-level concern for our neighbors.

To step back from empathy in the face of basic human need is often described as realism. But Isaiah suggests it may be a lack of imagination. “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways,” God says. That verse is sometimes used to shut down questions or excuse injustice. In context, though, it’s an invitation to participate in the divine imagination. God’s ways are higher because they are *more* generous, *more* merciful, and *more* committed to restoration, inclusion, and hope than we often dare to be. We’re invited to imagine what life would look like if it was shaped by trust in God’s abundance.

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Isaiah’s call to turn from our ways is not only about individual morality. It’s also about communal life. It asks us to examine and critique the assumptions and systems that normalize deprivation, and then to turn toward practices that affirm human dignity. Repentance here means rethinking—together—how our laws, policies, and priorities reflect what we believe about human worth. It means rooting ourselves not in anxiety, but in love of neighbor and trust in God. Then, the prophet says, “you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song.” The invitation is to thanks and joy.

I’m reminded of something I witnessed while leading a group of college students on a spring break trip to Nicaragua. At a small, under-resourced Pentecostal church, one man shared a story from his childhood. His family had very little. Often, when he, his parents, and his three siblings gathered for a meal, there was only enough food for five of the six of them. One evening, as they sat down to eat, there was a knock at the door. A neighbor stood there whose husband, a day laborer, had been unable to find work for a week. She had no food for her two small children. Without hesitation, the man said, his mother went to the cupboard, took a large plate, and scooped onto it some of the food they were about to eat. She covered it with a napkin and handed it to the neighbor. Then the family divided among themselves the three portions that remained. He said he left the table a little hungry, but full of gratitude—thankful for the food he had eaten, and even more thankful for having such an example of faithfulness.

Friends, the challenging good news is that God invites us into a “kingdom of God” way of being together. Jesus says, “Bring to me what you have”—our loaves and fishes, our resources and our lives—so that they may be blessed and shared, and so that all may have enough. We follow Jesus by allowing our guts to be wrenched by the spiritual and physical needs around us, and by showing up for all our neighbors with bread, with heart, with voices, votes, and all we value. We show up with imaginations shaped not by anxiety, but by God’s generous grace and upside-down vision of abundance. Amen.

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Contemplative Service

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