

Scripture: Let Love Flow

SCRIPTURE

ISAIAH 49:8-12

The Message translation

God also says:

"When the time's ripe, I answer you.
When victory's due, I help you.
I form you and use you
to reconnect the people with me,
To put the land in order,
to resettle families on the ruined properties.
I tell prisoners, 'Come on out. You're free!'
and those huddled in fear, 'It's all right. It's safe
now.'

There'll be foodstands along all the roads,
picnics on all the hills—

**Nobody hungry, nobody thirsty,
shade from the sun, shelter from the wind,
For the Compassionate One guides them,
takes them to the best springs.**

I'll make all my mountains into roads,
turn them into a superhighway.

Look: These coming from far countries,
and those, out of the north,

These streaming in from the west,
and those from all the way down the Nile!"

New Revised Standard Version

Thus says the LORD:

In a time of favor I have answered you,
on a day of salvation I have helped you;
I have kept you and given you
as a covenant to the people,[a]
to establish the land,
to apportion the desolate heritages;
saying to the prisoners, "Come out,"
to those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves."
They shall feed along the ways,
on all the bare heights[b] shall be their pasture;
they shall not hunger or thirst,
neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike
them down,
for he who has pity on them will lead them,
and by springs of water will guide them.
And I will turn all my mountains into a road,
and my highways shall be raised up.
Lo, these shall come from far away,
and lo, these from the north and from the west,
and these from the land of Syene.



Theme Interpretation: Let Love Flow

During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear that many of the western world constructs intended to create a sense of safety had also created a false sense of security. In a global crisis, we were faced with a danger that defied our usual protective hedges. While some were made more vulnerable by economic and geographical factors, everyone was affected by the virus.

As it turns out, lines on a map do not stop the spread of disease; a pandemic does not recognize human-made boundaries. Our lives are deeply intertwined. Our well-being is bound, inextricably, to that of neighbors close by, and those halfway around the world. When we recognize our human codependency, we are better able to *let love flow*—generously and indiscriminately—to those who need it most.

When water comes to a village, everything changes. It touches every area of life—literally and figuratively! Having clean water close by means that when women in Nicaragua don't have to spend their whole day walking to the source, they might have other opportunities for learning or vocational growth. Children in Kenya no longer spend their days carrying heavy buckets, but instead they can go to school. Improved sanitation slows the spread of disease, so there is less preventable illness. Crops thrive in Vietnam, meaning that food security and nutrition improve in the whole community. Families can spend more time together.

Isaiah 49:8-12 articulates a stunning vision for a world of justice and equity; a world where everyone has enough, and all live in safety and abundance. It is also a vision for a world of *interconnectedness*. In this vision, what is good for you is also good for your neighbor; what is good for one country is good for the whole world; and what harms any one of us harms us all.

That Kingdom kind of vision runs through the work that we share in together through One Great Hour of Sharing—much like the stream that runs through Isaiah's Kingdom vision. Human-made constructs of one sort or another too often hinder human thriving, shoring up resources for some while leaving many to suffer. A world built on that sort of imbalance is counter to God's dream for creation. To help bring about that more just, abundant vision for humanity, One Great Hour of Sharing supports projects around the world

that create opportunity and empower communities. Through global partnerships, your offerings promote food security; enable health and wellness programs; support education and vocational training; and of course—provide access to clean, safe water.

Water, after all, is life.

In many ways, our world was not prepared for the weight of the COVID-19 pandemic. But because of your past generosity through One Great Hour of Sharing, many communities were better prepared to meet the challenges presented by COVID-19. Through projects that you have supported in the past, more people were equipped for the crisis with improved sanitation, access to clean, safe water for handwashing, and were empowered to prevent the spread of disease among their family and neighbors.

When you continue to give generously, you continue to give life—in the form of water and so much more—to people in need around the world. You continue to build on the dream of a world in which there is no thirst, no hunger, no suffering... just the abundance of life in a living stream.

You aren't just sharing water. When you share what God has given, you "let love flow." That love crosses all sorts of spaces and dividing lines, knitting together a better human story, and bringing the Kingdom of God about in our time.

*Nobody hungry, nobody thirsty,
shade from the sun, shelter from the wind,
For the Compassionate One guides them,
takes them to the best springs.*



Sermon Starter

Picture your church's mission impact as a stream. Where does it go? What path does it take as you commission members, resources, and the embodied words of the gospel to go out into the world? Whose lives are touched by that stream?

In Isaiah, God says "*I'll make all my mountains into roads, turn them into a superhighway.*" How does the mission stream that flows from your congregation shape the landscape as it makes its path through the world?

The people of Israel found themselves exiles in a strange land when Jerusalem was conquered by Babylon. Now, the Babylonians themselves have been conquered by Persia and Cyrus the Great.¹ The prophet speaks to the people after Babylon has fallen (sometime around 586-539 BCE). On the surface, it is a heavy time of war, poverty, and devastation.

But in spite of that devastation, it is also a time of restoration. This new generation of wanderers might be allowed, finally, to return home; to reclaim their land, rebuild their homes, even restore their Temple. All the while, the prophet assures Israel that their covenant with God has never been broken—even as their structures and institutions crumbled, God remained with the people.

One critical part of that covenant is that ***Israel's responsibilities extend beyond its own people***—God has called them to care more widely for the nations of the earth; to show **compassion** and mercy as an expression of covenant living.² This was part of their identity as God's people before the exile and remains true at their core as they move into a season of renewal. Even—maybe especially—in a time of upheaval, they are called to be people who live outside of themselves.

Isaiah 49:10 conveys a powerful vision for creation; it is a vision that will be brought to life by these people of covenant and restoration. To be in covenant means to be "a powerful agent and partner in the practice of loyal solidarity that makes a new future possible."³ In this moment, God is inviting them to step into their role as a community that will *let love flow* in new and innovative ways.

Covenant people are those who recognize that love is what we reap—but only if we first sow it. Only if we release it from our grasp, sending it out to transform the world around us. When you give generously through One Great Hour of Sharing, you *let love flow*. You empower families and communities around the world to live healthier, safer, more hope-filled lives. And ultimately, you build a world that honors the interconnectedness of all God's people.

In this time when all of life has been touched by the effects of the pandemic, we are called to be people of restoration; releasing love into the world in new and innovative ways that answer the unique needs of this season. As the body of Christ in the world, the Church of today puts flesh on this vision: a world shaped by love's movement from one place to another.

The Body of Christ today transforms everything it touches—much like the body of water at the heart of Isaiah's vision for humankind. Take your congregation on a journey downstream: maybe with pictures; maybe using visualization; maybe even setting up worship stations to explore different expressions of mission life. Dive into questions—maybe even celebrations—about your collective impact. Start with lives inside your own congregation, then look at your local community. And then, follow that stream all the way to Nicaragua; to Kenya; to Vietnam, and all the other places where your One Great Hour of Sharing gifts are at work.

¹ Hansen, Paul D. *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching Isaiah 40-66*. John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1995. Pgs. 1-3

² Hansen, Paul D. *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching Isaiah 40-66*. John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1995. Pgs. 130-132

³ Brueggemann, Walter. *Isaiah (Westminster Bible Companion)* (Volume 2, Chapters 40-66). Fourth Impression, Westminster John Knox Press, 1998. Pgs. 113-114



Order of Worship

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We are yearning for the day...

All: The day of God's hope made real.

**The day when nobody is hungry, nobody thirsty.
The day of God's Love flowing freely.**

One: Shade from sun and shelter from the wind,
The Compassionate One guides us to the springs
of living water in the Word and in mighty deeds.

All: Let us worship our God and Let Love Flow.

OPENING PRAYER

Source of Love-Made-Flesh, we stream to you from East and West seeking the right and holding on to the holy. Settle us body and soul in the land of hope your prophets proclaimed. Free our hearts and minds to hear anew the call to compassion, the challenge of community, the needs of our neighbors. Call to us that we may gather in Spirit and in Truth and be changed. Seated and settled now, this we pray in Jesus' name: Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of grace and abundance, we confess that we have stored up the blessings meant for all. We have pretended that we have done enough for our neighbors, when still we see their need. For the ways we obstruct the love you would let flow for all, we ask your forgiveness and a new way to live. Transform our hearts so that our actions may follow. Free us from the fear of scarcity and open our hands to heal your people and your land. Set our feet on new paths and guide us to the spring of your grace. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

One: Friends, believe this good news: nothing can dam the waters of God's love. The Compassionate One guides all those who seek the better way and will shelter us from the winds of recrimination. God's mercy frees us to make our broken places whole, reconnecting us to a higher call and new life. Love flows to us this day, and by God's power we are forgiven!

All: Thanks be God!

PASTORAL PRAYER

You immerse us in healing waters, and we are glad. Guide us to take part in shaping a world where all people know such joy. Let hunger end by the open hands of generous hearts. Let none be thirsty, as your love freely flows through each of your people. Let health be restored to the sick of body, mind, or spirit, and in Jesus' name, let us help. We who have known mercy are a people of mercy, strengthened through you and through your Son, Jesus. With a renewed and holy Spirit, we are joyful; we pledge justice; and we will make peace on all your mountains and plains. May such love flow through all your people, now and always. Amen!



LITANY

Suggestions: For the litany consider using a table-top fountain to provide the sound of living water. A worship leader could also pour water between two pitchers as the congregation responds. If the service will be online or if you can project images in your worship space, this litany is appropriate for use with a series of images beginning with a single drop and proceeding to a large waterfall, river, or ocean. Using photos or videos of bodies of water near and familiar to your congregation will give depth and power to the meditation.

One: Almighty God, your compassion washes over your people. People made in your image, yet weak when alone...

All: Small as drops, but love flows.

One: And like drops your people gather, seeking the way to you: drops make streams...

All: Wearing away the stone to let love flow.

One: Joining in a murmur of praise, the stream unites ...

All: In ever-flowing current to let love flow.

One: From the banks of hillside creeks and the streams that irrigate our fields, may our love converge

All: in a mighty river of mercy to let love flow.

One: For this we know: drops alone may dry too soon, but drops together are a flood of love.

All: In this and every hour: Let Love Flow.

OFFERTORY

"Nobody hungry, nobody thirsty" is the hope of God in Isaiah. With the gifts of our hearts, we let love flow, like new well-water to a thirsty village; for crops, for cooking, for life. Let our giving be an upwelling of generosity and may the stream of love bring about God's kin-dom. Our gift is prayer in action. Praise be to God.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Holy giver of all good gifts, bless now this offering that great hours of labor have made possible. Bless the drops that become mighty rivers of grace and transformation. Bless the vision of a world transformed. Let a shining river of love flow through us to your waiting world, in Christ's name. Amen.

BENEDICTION

May the Maker of rain and sea, Creator of all, and Giver of life awaken you that you may flourish;
May Jesus, our brother, redeemer of the lost and hope of the poor, call your name to follow in his footsteps;
And may the Holy Spirit flood you with such love, that you fill with joy all who drink from your well. God's peace is for all and is now with you.
Our worship is over: Let our service begin. Amen.

