TUESDAY COMMUNION
"Food for life - and it's all free!"

Hymn: 230 There's a wideness in God's mercy

Reading: Isaiah 55.1-5

Prayers:

The great bazaar in Damascus covers many acres. It follows two of the roads and the lanes between them. One of the roads leads down to what was once a Roman Temple, then a Christian Church and now one of the greatest mosques in the world.

Over the road with its small shops there is a great canopy and at the entrance to the markets is a man dressed in full traditional uniform, including the fez. Over his shoulders he carries a large drum of water and he shouts out to those going into the market his invitation or them to come and buy water.....

The water seller was familiar figure in the ancient world offering water in exchange for money. In an almost bizarre way, Isaiah pictures God as a water seller who shouts out to those passing by:

"Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters....."

It's as though God is saying, as it says in many versions of the old covenant:

"I will give you my love and my protection provided you are obedient to my will."

That is the sort of covenant, agreement that the world understands. We enter into these kinds of agreements days by day. You give me what I want and I'll give you what you request in return.

But the words of God, the one who sells the water of life, take on an unexpected and almost surreal dimension. The water seller becomes the one who also offers food, and not just any old food but "rich food", meat and fine olives! And all this is offered not at a high price but for free.

"You who have no money, come, buy and eat.
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

The first part of Isaiah is largely the story of how a nation, Israel, fails to keep its part of the Covenant which God made with his people at Mount Sinai. Keeping the "Law" was meant to be the means by which Israel kept her side of this agreement but the whole nation seemed to be losing the plot:

- The Kings ceased trusting in God and became obsessed with treaties and military power.

- There was corruption in the nation so that the poor were cheated left right and centre and justice wasn't given to those who couldn't afford to bribe the judges.
- The nation had forgotten that God desires above all else that people should known him and act rightly. Instead they worshipped other Gods and though the worship in the Temple was as busy as ever it was an outward ritual rather than an inner commitment!

The consequence of this failure has been the overthrow of the nation and the enslavement of many in Babylon.

This disaster has led many to question whether God has any further concern for Israel. Are they abandoned, dumped, by the God who has no further care for a people who have failed him and, in a sense, failed themselves!

What is different about the covenant with David is that it was an everlasting covenant which did not depend on David fulfilling the law. It didn't mean that David was exempt from doing what was right; just remember what happened over Bathsheba and the murder of her husband.

What was different about this covenant was the promise that God's love for David, and through David for the whole nation, was an "everlasting covenant".

The water-seller offers not only water but rich food and all this without the payment of any money. The God of Isaiah of Babylon is a God of grace, a God who we recognise in the life of Jesus, whose love is unconditional and which reaches out to all people in all time and places.

It doesn't mean we are exempt from seeking to know and do the will of God.

It doesn't mean that when we live and act in ways at are opposed to the will of God that there aren't inevitable consequences.

It does mean that God is with us, never far from those who turn to him, that is always the God of forgiveness and mercy who acts to put right what has gone wrong.

If God is gracious, then those who celebrate the resurrection, Christ with us, are called to be gracious, too.

As God's concern and care is constant so should be ours!

Amen