

“From the Wells of Salvation”
Isaiah 12:1-6

Today the Advent candle of *joy* illumines our path,
guiding our steps,
enlightening our minds,
leading us to draw water from the wells of salvation,
where (as Isaiah reminds us) all God’s people will trust and not be afraid.

At the well of salvation, we do not need to be afraid,
because, there, we are refreshed with the knowledge
that the LORD is our strength, our might, our salvation (vs. 2) . . .
and we refuse to “buy in” to the fear that world is shamelessly marketing among us,
for the world knows that fear sells.

Fear sells guns and car alarms and home security systems.
Fear prompts us to engage in torturing prisoners of war . . .
fear causes us to neglect our neighbors and ignore the refugees . . .
fear leads us
to build bigger walls
and create bigger bombs
and yell at one another with louder voices.

But at the refreshing well of salvation, things are different.
At the well, God nourishes us for faith rather than fear . . .
God invigorates us for service rather than selfishness . . .
and God endows us for faithful discipleship rather than despair.

In the world’s parched deserts that conjure the mirage of individualism and self-sufficiency
and entice us to *compromise* our faith,
we come to the well that strengthens us to *live out* our faith.

So, come to God’s well of salvation
that where the water of newness
cleanses us of selfishness and hatred . . .
and washes away the power of chaos and death . . .
and rinses us of our greed and brutality.

Come to God’s well of salvation where we are blessed with the compassion of the Wonderful Counselor.

Come to the well where we are empowered with the strength of our Mighty God,
Come to the well where we are nurtured with the unconditional love of the Everlasting Father.

And come to the well where we are embraced with the hope that is offered by the Prince of peace.

Come to the well where we discover
how every person, every created thing, is a potential messenger of God

that is sent to teach us
about our relationship with one another,
about our relationship with the world,
and about our relationship with God.

Let all people gather at the well of salvation and share the water of life,
for, in welcoming all people to the well,
our community of faith may begin to look a lot like the table of our Lord's heavenly banquet.

Several years ago, in the early fall, seminary professor Fred Craddock had been invited to the University of Winnipeg in Canada to give two lectures, one on a Friday evening and one on Saturday morning.

After delivering the lecture on Friday evening, it had begun to snow just a little.

Not only was Craddock surprised,
but his host was also surprised because in his letter of invitation, he had written,
"It's too early for the cold weather, but you might bring a little windbreaker, a little light jacket."

The next morning when Craddock got up, three to four feet of snow pressed against the door.

The phone rang, and his host said, "We're all surprised by this.

In fact, I can't come and get you to take you to breakfast.

The lecture this morning has been cancelled, and even the airport is closed.

If you can make your way down the block and around the corner,
there is a little depot, a bus depot, and it has a café. I'm sorry."

So Fred Craddock put on his little light jacket and went outside, shivering.

The wind was cold, the snow was deep.

He slid and bumped and finally made it around the corner into the bus station.

Every stranded traveler in Western Canada was in there,

strangers to each other and to him,
pressing and pushing and loud.

He finally found a place to sit,

and after a lengthy time a man in a greasy apron came over and said, "What'll you have?"

He said, "May I see a menu?"

The man said, "What do you want a menu for? We have soup."

Craddock asked, "What kinds of soup do you have?"

And the man replied, "Soup. You want some soup?"

He said, "That was what I was going to order – soup."

The man in the greasy apron brought the soup, and he put the spoon to it –

Yuck! It was the awfulest stuff.

It was kind of gray looking, and probably made of moose innards or something;

it was so bad he couldn't eat it,

but he sat there,

and because the bowl was warm,
he put his hands around it.

Then the door opened again.

The wind was icy, and somebody yelled, “Close the door!”

In came this woman clutching her little coat.

She found a place, not far from Fred Craddock.

The man in the greasy apron came, “What do you want?”

And she said, “Glass of water.”

He brought a glass of water, took out his tablet and said, “Now what will you have?”

She said, “Just the water.”

He said, “You have to order, lady.”

“Well, I just want a glass of water.”

“Look, I have customers that pay – what do you think this is, a church or something? Now what do you want?”

She said, “Just a glass of water and some time to get warm.”

“Look, there are people that are paying here. If you’re not going to order, you’ve got to leave!”

And he got really loud about it.

So she got up to leave . . .

but then, almost as if rehearsed, everybody in that little café stood up and started toward the door.

Craddock also got up and said, “I’m voting for something here;

I don’t know what it is, but I’m in favor of it.”

And the man in the greasy apron said,

“All right, all right, all right, she can stay.”

Everybody sat down, and he brought her a bowl of soup,

and she started eating it and enjoying it, appreciating it,

as if the broth had been made from the well of salvation.

Craddock said to the person sitting there by him, “Who is she?”

He said, “I never saw her before.”

The place grew quiet, but all through the room he could hear the sipping of that awful soup.

Craddock thought, “I’m going to try that again.”

He put his spoon to the soup – you know, it was not bad soup.

Everybody was eating this soup.

Craddock started eating the soup, and it was pretty good soup.

He had no idea what kind of soup it was.

He don’t know what was in it,

but he did recall when he was eating it with everyone else around him

it tasted a little bit like bread and wine.

Just a little like bread and wine.”¹

Together, around God’s well of salvation, life becomes new.

Awful soup becomes something sacramental.

Outsiders become family.

A table is shared.

And before we know it, we experience the new reality that God is revealing to us,

and we are strengthened to participate in God’s work in the world

and empowered to embody the grace, love, and joy of the One

who provides us with an endless supply of living water.

At Advent, that is the hope we can envision . . .

that is the song we can sing . . .

and that is the love we can embrace . . .

when, as God’s people, we gather in unity, in solidarity, in grace, at God’s well of salvation.

This sermon was delivered by Tom Ulrich
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¹ Fred B. Craddock, *Craddock Stories*, edited by Mike Graves & Richard F. Ward, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), pages 83-84.