

Title: “Hunger”

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John 6:35, 44-45

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Service Readings: 1 Kings 19:1-8; Eph. 4:17-5:2; John 6:35-51

Exegetical: In this narrative, John records a conversation between Jesus and the Jews concerning his identity. He uses a metaphor of bread and hunger to identify him as the one sent by God to bring everlasting life to those who believe.

Focus: Jesus calls us to hunger for him.

Function: That my hearers may seek the source for their hunger in God's Word and turn to Jesus to satisfy that hunger.

Malady: Too often we hunger for the things of the world but Jesus wants us to hunger for him.

Means: Jesus, the living bread from heaven, has come down to offer eternal life. The Father draws us to him, makes us hunger for him, and we find him in the Word. It is there where our hunger is satisfied.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Our passage this morning picks up immediately after the gospel passage from last week. In fact, this verse is Jesus' reply to the crowd that was asking for the bread that comes from heaven and gives life to the world. Jesus replies that *he is* that bread. And with that reply the conversation goes off the rails. The Jews grumble and although we don't read what happens next, I'll tell you: the disciples have a difficult time believing Jesus and many of his followers turn their back and no longer walk with him. All this because Jesus claimed to be the source of eternal life.... And also because he told them they would have to eat of his flesh. Indeed, the reactions are not all that surprising.

This is truly a difficult passage but not for obvious reasons. On the surface, at least from where we sit - two thousand years later and libraries filled with books about Jesus - the meaning is fairly straight forward: Jesus is our savior, sent from heaven by the Father, to secure for us eternal life. If we believe, we will be saved. Bread metaphor or not, the message is no more complicated than this. But is that really all there is? Are there any nuggets hiding under the surface of this passage? Is there anything left undiscovered?

<pause>

Speaking of nuggets, during the California gold rush of the early 1850s over 300,000 people migrated to what would soon become a state. Yes, 300,000 people. It was the largest migration in

US history. One in 90 people traveled to that area to do one thing: find nuggets hidden beneath the surface of the land. On the surface there was little to see, but below it lay riches beyond imagination and those miners were hungry for it, starving for it, even. Many sold everything they had and risked their very lives to travel across the country in search of this food that promised a fullness to their lives. They believed that they could never be fed, never be full any other way. And for those who did find gold, who did “strike it rich” there are very few accounts of them retiring. Very few recorded statements of men who said “I have found enough gold. I am full” and then laid down their shovels and returned to their homes. Quite the opposite, in fact. The more they ate from this buffet of riches, the hungrier they became. They were hungry when they arrived and finding an ounce of gold didn’t satisfy that – it only made the hunger worse. A pound of discovered gold only drove them to seek another and then another.

They were never full; they were always hungry. And this motivated them to dig deeper, seeking that next nugget that lay hidden just under the surface of where they searched. Now think for a moment how this must have changed them, transformed them as they focused on meeting this single need. From the very beginnings of their adventures, it drove them to redefine who they were: once farmers and businessmen, they were now miners; exchanging their current lives on only a promise that it would result in a better, richer one. This transformation began immediately when the hunger first entered them and it didn’t complete until their death. Holes now dug not for gold but to bury their lifeless bodies – bodies transformed but always hungry until that final breath. Would they have done any of this, would they have gone through any of this transformation if not for their hunger?

<pause>

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

Jesus offers *himself* to the world but he knows that *only* those who hunger for *him* will seek him out; all others who hunger for the things of this world will have no interest. They will see but not believe. They will be offered but will decline. They will look to the world to satisfy their needs but they will never be full. They will hunger until after their final breath when they recognize with their eyes and ears what their hearts had always known: that the true source of life was never self, never the pursuit of worldly things, but was Christ. But it will then be too late for repentance. They will be cast down and live eternally in suffering hunger for what they once rejected.

But for those who hunger for Christ will be eternally fed.

⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me

Those who have heard God’s Word and believed, this passage teaches, will be drawn to the Father. They will find a hunger deep in their hearts that will spark a transformation. They will come to know that satisfaction cannot come from the things of the world but from Jesus, himself. They will come to see that their lives, once lived for self, will now be lived for Jesus. Their hunger, once fed by

selfish desires, they will now be fed by his grace. Their hunger will now be a hunger that only he can satisfy. And he does so with bread and wine but not in the way the world expects. The bread that he gives for the life of this world is his very flesh – nailed to a cross and forsaken by God. This is the eternal bread, his broken body given as a sacrifice and then raised to life on the third day. This is the eternal bread that he offers us. This is the eternal bread that promises life everlasting.

<pause>

I asked earlier if there were any nuggets hiding under the surface of this passage? If there was anything left to be uncovered. But maybe better questions might be these: Is there anything hiding under the surface of this passage that you are hungry to uncover? Is there anything hiding under the surface of *any* passage that you are hungry to uncover? Are you hungry to know him more, to spend time listening to him as he speaks to you through the pages of the Bible? Are you hungry to seek after him, carving out time in your day to learn more about him? Do you long to be fed at his table, to be receive his forgiveness and mercy through his body and blood? This is what it means to be hungry for him. Are you?

Now, don't misunderstand me. In no way am I implying that you must seek to be saved or that you should question your salvation. Not at all! In your baptism you have been assigned to Jesus, given new life and you should live in confidence of it.

³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

You have been eternally fed – first through your baptism and now at the Lord's Table. But do you still seek him or do you go out into the world satisfied that you know him "enough?" The passage today tells you that Jesus wants you to want him, all of him, in every moment of your life. He wants you to want his forgiveness, *need* his forgiveness when you sin. He wants you to want his body and blood, *need* his body and blood to give you comfort and peace. He wants you to want his words, *need* his words to enter your ears and work on your heart. He wants you to want him, He wants you to *need* him. He wants you to hunger for him. And he is at the table, his table, waiting to satisfy that hunger forever more.

He wants you to pursue him like the miners of old pursued their gold. They gave up everything, allowed themselves to be transformed to a different life, and they never stopped searching for more. This is what he is asking you to do this morning: to never stop wanting to learn about him, never stop wanting to know him more. And so, I'll end with this:

How hungry are you for Jesus?

Please pray with me.

Bread of Life sent us from heaven,

eternal food to fill our soul.

Living Word, fill with Your Spirit,

You are the Manna Who makes us whole.

From "Bread of Life" by Kathleen Botka