

Anybody Hungry?

25 July 2021

What does it mean to be hungry? There are two main definitions of hunger. One as a noun. "Feeling of discomfort or weakness caused by lack of food, coupled with the desire to eat". One as a verb. "Have a strong desire or craving".

We have two parables in the Gospel assigned for today. In the first Jesus is speaking first to the physical hunger of the group. Jesus and his disciples are gaining a reputation - word of their fabulous and unique way of living is getting around. And so, everywhere they go they are met by or followed by a crowd. This day is no exception.

The disciples find themselves in a crowd, of what is estimated to be 5,000 people. Jesus tests them by asking where they would buy bread for the entire crowd to eat. Philip spots a little boy with five barley loaves and two fish, and -- well -- you know the rest of the story...except maybe things didn't happen quite that way.

Back in those days, if you were traveling, you would always carry food with you, usually a day's worth if not a little bit more as there were no restaurants or food trucks to stop at and eat. Stay with me now...is it possible that Jesus took the young boy's lunch to show the crowd what they were to do? To share with those around them? Is it possible that the feeding of the five thousand was, in fact, the first potluck picnic?

"Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted". (John 6.11, NRSV) There was so much leftover after everyone had eaten that there were twelve baskets collected with the leftovers. Jesus "fed" them to sate their hunger.

In the second, Jesus completely freaks out the disciples by walking on water. They have been waiting for Jesus, who is late. So they cast out the boat and began rowing to the other side of the lake. The winds pick up and it is dark.

They are anxious and frightened. And so to calm them, Jesus walks towards them...on the water!. John writes, "they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.' Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going". (John 6.19-21, NRSV).

There are multiple examples of Jesus feeding for physical need and also for emotional and other needs, wants or cravings. In the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus feeds the crowd, literally helping sate their hunger. In the walking on water, Jesus feeds their safety by walking to them, assuaging their fear and getting them safely to shore.

When we hunger it can be for many things...

Hunger for food

Hunger for peace and justice

Hunger for touch

Hunger for love

The hunger for food we saw through the parables of feeding the five thousand. Jesus has also fed his disciples on the beach just after his resurrection. Jesus understands the importance of feeding and being fed.

The hunger for peace and justice has been around as long as there has been humanity. There is a spotlight now on the rights of BIPOC or Black, Indigenous and People of Colour and the ways they are treated by law enforcement and society in general.

Every week former Residential Schools are finding the remains of children buried in unmarked graves. These children need to be properly interred in the proper rituals and traditions to give them, and their loved ones peace. They need to hear the songs of their ancestors as their souls are guided home through song. "Gimikwenden Ina" being one example. "Do you remember?"

We must continue to walk the road to reconciliation with our Indigenous siblings as well as other members of the BIPOC community. These problems have existed for millenia, they won't be solved in a few months.

It will take a very long time for us to truly find peace and justice, yet if we are committed to doing the work, to hearing the hard stories, and committing to learn and do better, then we can work towards closing a horrific chapter in this country. And by closing the chapter I don't mean that we forget, that can never happen.

The hunger for touch is something that many of us have been experiencing through this time of COVID. Some people do not like to be touched and now that we are moving through COVID and restrictions are beginning to lift, it does not mean that they will suddenly like being hugged. Always check if you are in doubt!

What I mean is, for people who have been isolated, and unable to see their families, hugging has taken on a new significance, as has touch. I admit, I'm anxious about shaking hands. I continue to wash my hands or sanitize them as much as I did at the beginning of COVID and I likely will continue to. I am very aware of where my hands are and where they have been.

I'm thrilled that I'm once again allowed to visit hospitals and care homes. And I can take someone's hand to share affection and connection. I had joked last year that once we were able to hug again I'd be standing downtown with a sign and would hug and hug and hug. Except, I know that won't happen. I'm careful with the circumstances surrounding hugs. I do anticipate that when I see my Mam in August I'll hug her a little longer than usual. Maybe my brother as well. Definitely my nephews and grandchildren.

The hunger for love is something that everyone wants, at one time or another. I don't mean love in a sexual way, necessarily, but an intimacy, a revelation of one's true self to a stranger. Feeling a deep connection that is not fulfilled in other ways...not fulfilled by other people. A deep sharing of one's absolute truth, without fear.

I met a woman a couple of years ago when her husband was dying. He had been newly diagnosed with cancer and didn't have long to live. His last days were keeping him as comfortable as possible, in the Palliative Suite at Elk Valley Hospital. He died peacefully, surrounded by his family. When he died, she was devastated.

Her sobs at his hospital bed after his death remain fresh in my mind. She was shattered and broken and plunged into darkness. I feared that she would get stuck in the darkness, and be unable to find the light.

After several months, I reached out to her and she was bereft and still, primarily in darkness. There didn't seem to be much, if any, light in her life. She was hungry -- for love, for touch, for companionship. She was hungry for a way to come through the darkness and back into the light.

Several months ago I got a message from her telling me she had met someone. I was thrilled for her! She asked if it would be weird if I married them. I told her it would be weird and definitely unfair if I was NOT asked to marry them. I had traveled through the darkness with her, now it was time to walk with her, and her new love, through the light.

Yesterday, with smoke filled skies, surrounded by a small group of their nearest and dearest, Bev married Randy, the man who helped bring her from the darkness into the light. He is a man who understands intimately the darkness she was feeling as he is also a widow. He, too, had walked through that darkness, and now, together, they walked from darkness into light. Their hunger for love was sated in each other.

Being able to preside at the wedding of Randy and Bev Durham was such an honour as I was able to reconnect with Bev's family and walk with them again. The first walk had been in darkness and this walk was into light...even though we could not see mountains because of smoke.

And so, my friends, I encourage you to seek ways to feed your hunger: be it for food, for peace and justice, for touch or for love. Seek that in each other and through God. Know that we are never truly alone when we trust in God.

And a gentle reminder that things will not "go back to normal", rather, we should move into a new way of being. Hopefully a kinder, more loving and justice-seeking way of being. The way we worship has changed and will continue to develop and adjust to our adjusting world. The way we connect with one other; through being in the same room, and by being connected through an internet connection and a screen.

I pray that as we return to worship inside our beloved buildings we will continue to embrace the new things we have discovered, while incorporating the traditions of a pre-COVID time, including the Eucharist.

I pray that as vaccinations continue to rise and restrictions continue to lessen, we will step outside our own needs only, and look at the needs of others. New ways of being together in Worship and in faith. Then and only then, our hunger for food, peace and justice, touch and love will be sated.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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Sermon for Pentecost 9
John 6.1-21