

“Hungry Hearts”

a sermon by:

Rev. Katie Crowe
First Presbyterian Church
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Some of you may have seen a little video clip or received a flyer or seen an article that asked the question, are you hungry for more from your lunch break? A question, maybe that brought you here today and I'm so glad you came. For the first weeks of the season we are going to explore themes of hunger and thirst in the spiritual life, reflect on the stories of those who experienced and grappled with them, and greet the one who supplies all our needs in the person of Jesus Christ who uses images of hunger and thirst to talk about the way God invites us to be filled with him. So our first lesson comes from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 55:1-13. Hear the Word of God:

“Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.” Hear ends our reading. The Word of the Lord: Thanks be to God.

“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” What a fantastic question! In essence, what are you working for, what are you striving for. What do you hope for? What are you hungry for? It is a good question now and it was a good question 2600 years ago when Isaiah first asked it of the people Israel. “Listen carefully to me,” he said, “and eat what is good.” There are a lot of ways we can talk about hunger. There is the hunger of high noon on a Wednesday with an empty stomach intent on voicing its concern that its sitting in church instead of at a lunch table somewhere. There is the hunger for success. Hunger for a break. Various appetites that are longing to be filled- and have we got a lot of them. The hunger for acceptance. For reconciliation. The hunger to be healthy. To be loved. The list goes on. Isaiah asks because he knows that we all hunger for something and whether we realize it or not we are driven through the world by the impulse to get that hunger filled- one way or the other- by something. Israel’s hunger at the time of Isaiah’s writing came from a place of deep longing and intense pain that they were aching to fill. They were exhausted from being assaulted by their enemies, weary from being dislocated from their homes, famished by their isolation. Hungry because of their circumstances but also hungry in their hearts- in their souls- in the core of who they were. Starving to know that God had not completely turned his back on them because of their sin. And striving in every possible way- not all of them holy or life-giving let alone effective- to get back to the presence of God so that they could be filled.

If you are hungry in your stomach it is easy to know where to go especially if you work uptown. You want sushi try Room 112 or one of the dozen other places. Southern cuisine- hit King’s Kitchen. Italian, seafood, pub food- in this context if you can name your hunger and you’ve got cash in your pocket chances are you can fill it especially if you get in the door by 11:45. But what do you do with a hungry heart? What about when you are hungry way down in the depths of your soul in the core of who you are? What about that gnawing hunger that is so elusive you can hardly name it. But so pervasive that you suspect in your rare quiet moments that it may just be driving the urge behind everything you do? Unlike other hungers that a lot of people and institutions and industries invite you to pay them to fill you can’t just browse through a menu of options readily on display along Tryon street to satisfy this craving but it is real. And it not only must be filled, it was made to be filled.

To this deep, gnawing anonymous pain, to the low, grumbling discontent of spiritual hunger, to the restless appetite that can’t seem to be satisfied, to those who are more accustomed to the phrase ‘I don’t know what I’m hungry for’ coming from their hearts rather than their stomachs Isaiah challenges and beckons and calls and cries out, “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” He rings the dinner bell- the elated announcement of God to his people, ‘you can be filled,’ “everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!” These are imperative statements- not like commands- but invitations, exclamations- “Come, buy wine and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price... Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.”

That appetite for something deeper, the hunger for something more, the thirst to be loved the longing to know you are not alone is a God-given desire. It is God's invitation to you to find your place at the table of the only one who can satisfy a hungry heart. Listen, Isaiah says- to that desire- notice the hunger, name the thirst- so that you can live. God is calling. When we can get clear on our need then we can stop spending money on things that can't and won't feed our true hunger. And stop pouring energy and time into endeavors that will not satisfy our true thirst. Whether 2600 years ago or today the hunger for God is the same. The only thing that has changed is the number and variety of ways in which we can pursue trying to fill it before we realize that we are simply being called to grow in our relationship with him.

Before us is a feast of acknowledgement of that hunger and the offer of the acceptance, love mercy, forgiveness and grace that will fill it that is freely given to us by God not because it has no price because it is actually very costly, but because the price has been paid by the one who sat at this table before you, Jesus Christ who gave up his life to satisfy the deep need of the world. Here you are invited to seek the Lord while he may be found and call upon him while he is near. So come, all of you. Receive the gift of his mercy and begin to feed your hungry heart with that which will truly satisfy. Amen.

