

“Hungry?”

Gen 32:22-31, Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21

Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church
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Have you ever been hungry? Most of us probably don't have to be hungry very often. In fact often we have much more than we need to eat. This last week I went backpacking with the Boy Scouts and we took just enough food for each day, so there were times that we began to get a little hungry, Even then we knew that our next meal was coming. But it made me think about being hungry. And then as the week progressed it was obvious that there are some other “hungers” that we have. One of those was a desire to no longer be food for the mosquitoes! Another, perhaps, was the hunger for the comforts of home, no longer the hard ground but a real bed, the comforts of companionship, family, what we knew. So we came back a little bit early to fulfill that hunger.

As I thought about those hungers we have I recognized that there are a group of people called social psychologists who think about what are our basic needs. They've broken it down into three groups. There are the essentials - we need our physical, biological needs met - food, shelter, safety. Then they have something called “relatedness”. All across the board, by people who are trying to figure this out, relatedness seems to always be there. We need relationships with significant people in our lives. It's one of the basic motivations to who we are. And the third rather basic motivation that they identify is what we might call creativity or productivity. I would put it this way - we all have the need to bring something to life. Bring something, to feel that we are doing something, contributing, expressing.

Those are the needs that they identify and I don't know if they have us pegged completely, but I do think that there is someone who knows what we need. I think Jesus knows who we are and what we need. That day, as he got out of the boat, perhaps most of us would have been pretty disappointed that we didn't have that time alone, yet he saw the crowd. He saw their need and he responded. He responded - the very first thing - with compassion. I want to talk some more about how he responded and what he delivered, but I want to first think about who was there, who came to that deserted place, to be there when Jesus got there. A deserted place was not a place where most people went in those days. It was considered a place of chaos, a place outside of our essentials. It wasn't safe; there wasn't food; there wasn't shelter. It wasn't a place people went to without reason. These people went there for a reason. They went there because they knew Jesus was going to show up.

It really doesn't tell us who was there other than a crowd. We do know in Matthew that a crowd generally is in distinction from the Scribes and the Pharisees and the chief priests, and probably were the folks who were struggling to get along. A lot of folks in those days were day laborers. If they took a day off, no money, no food. But they saw a need to be with Jesus. Perhaps there were some people of privilege there but my guess is if they were there, they saw that their privilege did not satisfy them. They were coming because they had an appetite for something that Jesus could give them.

But who wasn't there? Most likely it was the Scribes, the Pharisees, those folks. Why didn't they show up? Well, my guess is that they didn't show up because they already felt that they were satisfying their appetite. They were satisfying their hunger. They were taking the edge off it. They thought that they had it figured out. I always take that as a warning to not get too sure of what I know and who I am and what I think for fear I might miss what God is doing in some place I don't expect with folks that I do not expect God to be doing anything

with. So what did they find, those that were willing to go to that desolate place because there was one who was coming there who could feed them. They knew that because he had been feeding them. He had been feeding them with his words, with his descriptions of God's kingdom. They came and they found something they needed. You know, in a society like theirs, there were so many on the margins. They were so easily divorced from society by mistakes, a simple illness could be taken as being that which showed you were sinful and so cut you off. And here came Jesus. Instead of coming full of judgment, the crowd comes, and his response? In spite of his own need, his response was compassion. Where else were they finding it but in Jesus? And it says then that Jesus healed them.

You know we spend so much time with our medical model of healing where it's just this physical cure. Yet for them, healing was more than simply the physical. It was being healed in relationship, healed with God and healed with one another, that external judgment that had cut them off. How many times have we heard Jesus say "Go show yourself to the priest" so you can re-enter society. You can be healed; be part of the group. Here he's telling them you're healed; you have a Father whose arms are wide opened - such a different message than they were hearing from their own religious authorities. He gathered them in. First they knew of his compassion. They knew of his healing. They were encompassed as part of God's family once again. He fed them and I can't believe that while he was there he didn't do some teaching. He fed them with his words. He began to show them the hope that perhaps they had lost. They were hungry so they came. And they came and sat with him, came to a desolate place, a place where they shouldn't have been because they knew, in him, they had compassion, they had healing, they were truly fed.

You see, we can think of all of our needs, those basic ones, and I believe that the very basic needs we have all begin with one foundation - God. It is through our relatedness with God that we know the fullness of life. We can look for satisfaction in all kinds of other places but it is only through that relationship with God, to recognize God's love given us in Christ that we begin to find the true satisfaction.

It's an ancient text - 2000 years old - yet it feels to me like it still speaks today, to the hungers we have. You know, I think, we've tended to take those external authorities that judge us and internalize them. We still deal with the guilt that we have inside, sometimes it's simply the expectations of who we should be that are so unrealistic. There's a hunger for forgiveness. We can look in so many places to begin to satisfy our appetites. Often times, I think, we think we have taken the edge off and that whatever took that edge off can take us to the full satisfaction and it becomes nothing but a rut or a way of continually doing one more thing, hoping that this one more thing, or if I buy one more thing, or if I just have one more right experience, my life will have meaning. I'll be satisfied. But I believe that until we allow God to feed us, to recognize that the real satisfaction for our hunger is in the love of God in Jesus Christ we may take the edge off but we never fully satisfy that hunger and we can become driven. Jesus invites us to come. Know the open arms of the Father, experience the forgiveness, recognize the love, join together, come to the table. It is in fact, coming to the table that reminds us of where we are really fed, who really satisfies our hunger. At the base of every need, the beginnings are with God as we trust in him, as we recognize that he gives us hope, as we recognize our forgiveness is there, that being loved begins by accepting that love from God. Jesus fed those 5000 that day and has been feeding thousands over centuries and invites us as well. Are you hungry? Let's come to the table. Amen