

Hungry for Something Good  
Crossroads Christian Church  
Mar. 15, 2015 Lenten Series

Isaiah 55:1-9  
Matthew 5:1-6

Remember, if you will, about a time that you were really, really hungry for something good. Maybe comfort food, like Aunt Bess's chicken and noodles. Or maybe a traditional holiday meal, or the pie afterward. Or maybe a craving for a super-deluxe pizza.

Remember, if you will, about a time that you were really, really hungry, period. Maybe you'd been sick and hadn't eaten, and now you were better and your appetite was back with a vengeance. Or maybe you were on a diet, or a fast, and you were painfully aware of your empty stomach crying out for food. Or maybe, even, you were broke and the cupboard was bare.

Remember, if you will, a time you were thirsty, really thirsty. Maybe you were playing or working in the hot sun and didn't have a water bottle with you. Or maybe you were getting ready for surgery and had a "nothing by mouth" order, and your mouth was as dry as cotton.

Touch these memories, even though they may be a bit painful or prickly. Connect with the sense of urgency, of desperation, even, that you may have felt. With that in mind, imagine yourself in exile, with hundreds of miles of desert between you and your home. You don't even know if your old home is there any more. You know that the temple where you worshiped has been torn down, and is nothing more than a desolate pile of rocks on a hill. The God whom you worshiped in the temple seems to have let you down; or seems to have punished your people so severely that you wonder if there is any hope left. The song in the back of your mind is the one we call Psalm 137. "By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked of us songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" And the food? It wasn't like the food at home. Much of it you couldn't even eat if you were to stay true to your own laws and customs. Other people, strangers, pretty much had all the power over you, and made decisions for you.

In the midst of that misery, that darkness, that tragedy there came a prophet. "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ... Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near!" And somehow, a seed of hope is planted in your soul. Someday—maybe someday soon—you will get to go home again. You will get to sleep in your own bed. You will eat the food that you craved. You will no longer have to follow the whims of your human captors, but you can live by the law of your God. That which you have hungered and thirsted for will be yours.

Come back with me from ancient Babylon to today. It is Lent—a time of waiting, a time of hoping, a time of preparation, a time of anticipation, a time of hungering and thirsting for the fulfillment of God's new promise. We hear John the Baptist calling for repentance, for making a new road through the wilderness,

a road that God will travel to come meet us in our need; a road that we will travel to go home to God. We remember the longings of a people returned from Babylon, but still enslaved, yearning for word of a Messiah, God's anointed one, who will come to set them free. We hear excited whispers of visits from angels, we sense a quiet urgency that something new is coming, that God is ready to do a new thing.

Lent is here, and we hunger and thirst. We hunger and thirst for something from God—a word, a dream, a hope, a promise. We are aware of the pain of a world at war, we are aware of the injustice of a world where billions starve and don't have adequate water supplies, we are aware that even in our affluence we can't buy meaning; we can't buy love; we can't buy hope. In the darkness and the pain, we hunger and thirst for something from God.

So it isn't surprising that our Beatitude for today should speak to this time of Lent—blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. "Comfort, comfort now my people, tell of peace!" so says our God. Comfort those who sit in darkness, mourning under sorrow's load." We sing in minor key, knowing that at Easter we will be able to chorus, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today, Alleluia."

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Listen to some different translations of this beatitude: In Luke, it's just "*Blessed are you who are hungry now. Your hunger shall be satisfied.*" In Matthew, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.*" But in NEB, "*who hunger to see right prevail.*" Or footnote: "*to do what is right.*" Good News Bible: "*Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires.*" Notice the CEV: "*God blesses those people who want to obey God*" OR "*God blesses those people who want to do right,*" OR "*God blesses those people who want everyone to be treated right.*"

You can tell from all those translations that there's a lot involved in hungering and thirsting for righteousness. It talks about our own relationship with God, our own desire to have things right between us and God, to allow God to tear down the barriers of sin and fear that divide us. But it also talks about right living, and about a right world, where justice and peace prevail.

Jim Forest in Ladder of the Beatitudes reminds us of the social component. "When we begin to share in the sufferings of others, we cannot help but notice that often suffering is the result of injustice or is made worse by injustice. Jesus doesn't say "Blessed are those who *hope* for righteousness" or "Blessed are those who *campaign* for righteousness" but "Blessed are they who *hunger and thirst* for righteousness" -- that is, people who want what is right as urgently as someone dying on a desert thirsts for water."

Remember the words of Jesus, "I am the bread of life." Jesus said that after he fed the huge crowd that had followed him into the desert, using a boy's gift of two fish and five barley loaves. When Jesus lifted the loaves and blessed them, that it was like a preview of the Lord's Supper. Jesus used the power and grace of God to feed a multitude on that hillside, and Jesus is still feeding the hungering and thirsting people today. Jesus feeds the physically hungering and thirsting as people like us contribute to Caseyville and other food banks, or give

offerings that help bring emergency food supplies or that help people to better raise their own food through Week of Compassion and Heifer Project. And Jesus still feeds us spiritually as we gather at the table, and like him, give thanks and break bread. Here we find the living bread that alone satisfies.

So we live in a time of Lent, which is like Advent, a time of longing, a time of hushed waiting. We have many hungers, many thirsts, and a whole economy based upon meeting those hungers and thirsts for a price. We try to buy commodities to take the place of our deepest needs—love, belonging, peace, wholeness, but the not-so-cheap replacements we buy are spiritual junk food, food that does not satisfy. Our true hunger is for God; for God's righteousness. And we are truly blessed, because through Jesus Christ we can find satisfaction. As Jesus Christ said, "I have come that you might have life, and that you might have it abundantly."

Isn't it good to know that when we are truly hungry and thirsty for God's righteousness, God's presence, God's justice, God's love, we have the promise that God will satisfy our hunger. God will fill us with that which truly satisfies. The communion table is a visible symbol of that promise. You who are hungry, you who are thirsty, come to the table of the Lord. Come share the living bread. Come share the Lord. Amen.

By Michael E. Dixon