

“Healing Our Hunger”
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Presbyterian Church in Leonia
July 29, 2018

2 Samuel 11:1-15
John 6:1-21

Last night we took my mother-in-law out for her birthday, to an old-style seafood restaurant, right on the harbour in City Island in The Bronx. It was an early dinner and we had spent the day together at the Bronx Zoo, where we had shared a late lunch, so I wasn't really that hungry. But then I saw the bread basket: two round loaves of warm, crusty white bread, and a golden chunk of sweet cornbread. Who can resist freshly baked bread? Not your pastor, as it turns out!

In many restaurants, bread is typically served to take the edge off of hunger, while you wait for the food that is to be the main event. Similarly, most mothers who have nursed a baby know that the first milk that comes out is high in sugar; it soothes angry hunger so that the baby has the energy to stay and eat longer, and take in the higher fat milk that comes in later and provides more lasting nutrition and satisfaction. And so, in the restaurant we try not to make the bread the main event. As I try to ration out my daughter's eager grabs for the bread, telling her to save room for what's next, I try to follow my own advice: *just wait, there's more!*

This is the week that the lectionary passes us off from Mark's gospel to John's. I did not preach on it last week, but I find it very interesting that last week's lectionary gospel passage gave us **Mark's** version of the feeding of the 5,000 with loaves and fishes. And the same story gets repeated this week, but in **John's** gospel. Not only that, but as we stay in John for the

rest of the summer, we have 4 more Sundays with gospel passages centered around bread:

-Bread from Heaven

-Bread of Life

-Whoever eats of this bread will live forever

-And then, finally, Jesus offers himself for consumption: "Whoever eats *me* will live because of me-- this is the bread that came down from heaven."

It is as if the waiter keeps coming around with yet another basket full of warm and delicious bread. It may even seem that bread is the point, that bread is the main meal we are supposed to have. And if that is what you get out of the gospels, I think that is a fine message, a fine spiritual outlook. Like the manna that fell to the ground from heaven while the Israelites were lost and wandering in the wilderness, perhaps that is enough. The Israelites were told to just take what they need, enough manna for that day, and that there would be enough; when they tried to store it to save for the next day, it would turn into maggots and begin to smell. For they were to trust in God, that each day God would provide *exactly* what was needed, nothing more and nothing less. So if you want to read into these gospel passages the meaning that Jesus is the bread that we need, nothing more and nothing less, I think that is a fine interpretation.

Still, something whispers to me from the text, "But wait, there's more!" I mean, the *point* of the people wandering in the wilderness was not that God provided them manna to eat. We could look at the point being that God is a God who liberates from oppression, or that God is a God who will stick it out with the suffering, to see them through to the other side of the Jordan. You wanted manna? Just wait, there's more: God promises a land flowing with milk and honey.

I suspect that there is more to this story than the miracle of feeding many people-- so please do not get too worried or wrapped up in the mechanics of how this or other miracles could have happened, because I do not think

the miracle is the point. Jesus is not just a magic genie, or an errand boy, there to fix a physical hunger¹. The act of multiplying the loaves and fishes gave the people something to calm their immediate hungers so that they could open to something more eternal. It's not that our bodies, our bodily needs, do not matter-- in fact, they matter so much, that Jesus tends to them first. James 2:15-16 warns, "If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily bread, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what good is that?" No, Jesus knew something about healing our hunger, so that he could then offer something that sustains us for even longer. Just wait, there's more!

Let us look at another kind of hunger. God has already given David the things that should satisfy his immediate hungers: a rise to power; the defeat of his enemies; a house-- really, a palace-- of cedar. But wait, there is more! God has promised the things that go *beyond* immediate hungers. God promises another kind of house-- this time not a house of cedar, but a house for God's name, throne of David's kingdom forever; "I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me." Further, God promises, "I will not take my steadfast love from him."

And yet, David hungers for something more. He yearns for something that is not included in these promises from God.

David's is the hunger of the man who has it all. It is the hunger for domination. 2 Samuel begins the passage in ch. 11 telling us readers that it is springtime, "*the time when kings go out to battle.*" But David is not out at battle; he is at home, and instead of a battlefield, the site of his conquests is a woman's body. If we look at this story through the awareness we have hopefully learned through the #MeToo era, we can see that nothing about David's encounter with Bathsheba is consensual. Although our bibles say David "sent messengers to get her," the original Hebrew reads more like, "David sent messengers and *took* her." There

¹ Charles Cousar, *Texts for Preaching Year B*

was no asking; rather, David saw something he wanted and so he took. When Bathsheba is found to be pregnant while her husband, a faithful soldier is out fighting the King's battles, David's concern is not Bathsheba's well-being but instead how he can avoid being exposed for stealing what belonged to another man. And so, he sends Uriah into the front of the battle lines and asks his other soldiers to step back, leaving Uriah exposed and killed.

Uriah was not an Israelite; in fact, he was a Hittite, but his dedication to Yahweh and to the kingdom he wanted to belong to made him among the highest calibre of soldiers serving in the king's army. Yong-Hwan Kim, when he became a Christian, chose the name of Uriah, because-- he said-- he wanted to show the kind of dedication to God that Uriah showed to David². Living as an Asian American, he applied the best of who he was to the service of his adopted country, the USA. However, no matter how great his contributions, he continued to be treated as an outsider in both obvious and subtle ways. There was the blatant discrimination, but then there was also the regular question, "Where are you from?" in which the asker can never be satisfied with a simple, truthful answer, "I am from New York." "No, *really*, where are you from?" always reminded him of his status on the margins. And so, Yong-Hwan identifies with Uriah the Hittite-- who, though not an Israelite, fought on the front lines for Israel in David's battles, would not go home and enjoy the warmth of his wife in his bed because he would not leave King David's doorway entry as long as the Ark of the Covenant remained on the battlefield. His dedication to King David and the Israelites cost him his life.

I know there are many people out there who would make great Americans: upstanding citizens who enhance our communities and contribute to our economies and help to shape our culture to become better than we are. But there is a loud enough, powerful enough, group out there that wants to remind these aspiring Americans, "you'll never become one of us." Too

² Uriah Yong-Hwan Kim, "Uriah the Hittite: a con(text) of struggle for identity

often in our country we feed ourselves as individuals rather than discovering how much more enjoyable a meal can be when it is shared among many. Jesus instructed us to pray, “Give *us* this day *our* daily bread”-- not “Give *me* this day *my* daily bread.”

When I lived in New York City working as an intern my first year out of college, I was overwhelmed by all the wonderful choices of different foods to try. Sometimes, after working at the UN, I would begin walking towards home, a 5 mile journey to the Morningside Heights neighborhood. I walked, because I wanted to see all the options of restaurants and choose for myself the most interesting and delicious-- not to mention affordable on my intern’s stipend-- meal. However, what would often happen in my quest for food perfection, was that I would keep walking, waiting for just the right thing to appear, and in my prolonged waiting I would reach an exhausted, cranky, HANGRY state. When I just couldn’t take it any more, I would inevitably pull my desperately hungry body into a place where the food was both mediocre and overpriced.

What I later realized was that what I was hungry for was not the perfect meal. What I really craved was good company to share the meal-- and what I was eating did not matter so much than who I was eating *with*. Having just come from college where all I had to do was poke my head out of my dorm room door to have friends just spilling into the hallway, it was an adjustment to move to a city where I knew no one and had to actually work at making friends. I was lonely! But over a few months, my exhausting and disappointing quests for the perfect dinner out became delightful evenings shared with laughter and friendship, and what we ate did not so much matter.

I wonder what would have happened if David had taken some time to think through what he was really hungering for. If he had seen Bathsheba from a window in his palace, and instead of “taking her” just noticed his attraction for such a beautiful woman, but then respected her right to privacy. What

might God have given him if David had brought his hunger before God-- whether it was hunger for sexual satisfaction, or for greater power, or for assurance that he was still located in the midst of God's steadfast love?

Jesus knew we often reach for the most immediately satisfying thing when we do not know our deepest hungers. And so, he kept showing up with bread to offer: "Let me take care of your immediate hungers, so that together we might explore your deepest hunger and how together we might satisfy that."

What are you hungry for? What are you hungry for? As we journey forward in faith, grab a piece of bread and take the edge off your hunger, but do not forget about it. Christ is here, and as much as we can share our hungers in Jesus' presence, he will show us the way to being filled. "Impossible!" you might say, just as the disciples questioned "what are the few loaves and fishes of a young boy in the face of thousands of hungry people?" The disciples forgot, as we often forget, forgetting that they are speaking to the one who "redefines what is possible."³

³ Charles Cousar, *Texts for Preaching Year B*