



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

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Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

Psalm 112

Matthew 5:6

To hunger and thirst and be filled, on a very basic level we understand what Jesus is saying because staying alive depends on our hunger and thirst being filled.

And if you're like me, I will hunger and thirst around the Thanksgiving table this Thursday. You know I do like being here in Pittsburgh, but I do miss being in Louisiana for Thanksgiving.

My family would have smoked turkey and fried turkey; and if the vegetable could be casseroled, it would be in a casserole dish on the table. We would have sweet potato pie, pumpkin pie, pecan pie, and of course, our family's south Louisiana oyster dressing and gravy, and more than enough of everything for everybody! Someone asked me what my favorite dish was: Leftovers!

We know what it means to be more than filled, more than enough Thanksgiving!

Yet, as the man says, "not so fast, my friend;" because Jesus is not talking about that kind of food or drink.

Eugene Petersen in his interpretation of this Beatitude puts it this way, "You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's the food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat"

How does our life depend on this hunger and thirst for this best meal we'll ever eat? And, note the Beatitude doesn't say blessed are those who are righteous, but blessed are those of us who hunger and thirst for this righteousness.

Because Jesus says, “Those who have and will continue to have a craving, a powerful desire, a life or death need for righteousness will be filled.”

How is it, though, that this satisfies our hunger, our thirst?

Because when you are hungry, really hungry, all you care about is getting something to eat. When you are thirsty, all you care about is getting something to drink.

Are we really that hungry, that thirsty for what Jesus is talking about?

Heidi Grogan tells of a conversation with her son, Ross, who was recovering from anorexia.

He says, “I don’t think [most people understand] hunger. For them it is the mild sensation of intestinal vacancy...when we skip a meal or crave a midnight snack. Other places, other times (he says) hunger was a panic, a desperation, associated with famine and starvation.”

Is that our problem with what Jesus says about hunger and thirst for righteousness? Do we not understand our hunger, our thirst? We don’t have many needs. Is it that we don’t crave spiritual nourishment because we’re not aware we’re famished?

As Heidi Grogan describes us, “Emotionally and spiritually anorexic, we are alone and starving.”

Are we afraid to hunger and thirst for God because of our desire to be seen as independent, strong, and self-sufficient?

Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

Do we prefer the bittersweet taste of self-righteousness than to hunger and thirst for righteousness?

But Jesus says, “Hunger and thirst for righteousness, and you will be blessed?” So how does hunger and thirst for righteousness fill us so that we know the blessing of the best meal that we’ll ever eat?

Remember Mary’s song, Jesus’ mother in the second chapter of Luke offers praise to God when the angel tells her she will give birth to the Son of God, what we call the Magnificat.

She says that God *“has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed...”*

And she sings of how God *“has filled the hungry with good things...”*

Maybe, just maybe, Jesus remembers his Mother telling him her story of when she learned she was pregnant. As a handmaid, she said, one who was empty, like those who are poor in spirit, who are meek, she was filled.

Maybe Jesus heard his mother talk about how in the midst of the turbulence that roared around her, she found a final calm that came from faith in God; maybe she talked about how she and Joseph grew more confident that God was with them every step of the way as they journeyed to Bethlehem, and from that grew a great courage and gladness, thanksgiving.

Jesus knew a woman who was empty and had been filled with good things, who was blessed.

And Joseph. Matthew tells us all that we know about Joseph, that when he found out that Mary was pregnant, *“being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.”*

That’s all Matthew thought we needed to know about Jesus’ earthly father. He was a righteous man.

Maybe Jesus heard Joseph talk about how all he wanted to do was make sure Mary was cared for, how he and Mary had moved from their time of prayer, their time of hearing God speak of not dismissing her but taking Mary as his wife, how they had been filled with a peace beyond understanding and then been able to stand together and look steadily upon their world without panic, thanksgiving.

Joseph, being a righteous man and doing the right thing, integrity...Jesus knew a man who was righteous.

Jesus grew up with two people whose lives had been filled by the blessings of God; who I believe by word and deed showed Jesus how to develop this appetite, this hungering and thirsting for God’s righteousness.

To hunger and thirst for righteousness is the diet fed to Jesus by Mary and Joseph. What Jesus saw in Mary and Joseph, what he heard in their story was all about an appetite for God.

A hunger and thirst that offers healing, love, acceptance, and forgiveness without condemnation, just as they had received from God.

Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

Righteousness looks upon all people as being cherished by God, or as Jesus says to love one another as he has loved us.

And just like hungering and thirsting for food can get messy, so too this hunger and thirst for righteousness can get messy.

First of all, just how appetizing is it to hunger and thirst for righteousness? What does righteousness taste like? Smell like?

There's a story of a nun cleaning the wound of soldier. A reporter walks by and says, "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars."

The nun says, "Neither would I."

Righteousness, it seems, requires taking everything about us: our habits, our culture, our customs, our privileges, and putting them to the measure of God's love in Jesus Christ. It is all about what we hunger and thirst for when others are hungry and thirsty, our appetite for God, our relationship with God,

Let me be clear. It is easier not to love Jesus.

After all, loving Jesus is messy; it means that we need to love the people that Jesus loves. It means taking their interests to heart.

To hunger and thirst for righteousness, to live on the diet by which Jesus lived means giving up on the idea that we can indulge one appetite after another.

Jesus is saying, “No. Like the food that you eat, like other appetites that you have, as my followers you must be driven to sort things out with God and with others, hard as it may be; and this appetite must be as strong, or stronger than our desire to eat, cookies, ice cream, or our appetite fed by greed or hate or whatever it is consuming us.”

Just look at the stories Jesus told. It means extending a hand to assist a bleeding stranger who might be diseased. It means standing in the middle of the road looking for a wayward son and hugging him home with the best party ever.

Just look at Jesus himself. It means widening our circle of care.

He took lepers, the lame, blind and poor along with every other kind of sinner there is and prepared a table for them in the presence of their enemies.

All in all, an appetite for God involves other people and righteousness is not always that appetizing, because sometimes they smell like sin and taste like bad apples in the bunch.

It means setting aside fear of those who are different. It means looking at others as created in the image of God, our equals in the eyes of God.

To work up this appetite for God is when we know our need for each other; for the gift that each of us can receive of another person who needs our help through trouble, illness, bitterness, doubt, or grief.

Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

For God desires good for all God's creatures, to satisfy our hunger and thirst not just for food or drink, but for freedom, justice, peace, and love.

Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled": the best meal from the God of all blessings, thanksgiving.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.



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