

## Those Who Hunger and Thirst

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

“And he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” (Mark 6:34)

Today’s sermon has a verse that came to me apart from the lectionary. This happens sometimes. I’ll start with the readings, then another verse forces its way in and won’t go away. It’s like a child tugging at your sleeve, trying to get your attention. This week’s message comes from the Beatitudes as found in Matthew’s gospel, chapter 5, verse 6: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for a right relationship with themselves, with the world and with God. This hunger and thirst suggest a deep, urgent need that must be fulfilled. It is a matter of life and death, physical as well as spiritual. The scripture spoke to a people who knew the daily realities of the gut-wrenching rumbling of the empty belly and the parched panting of the dry throat.

That sensibility lies behind today’s gospel. The 12 have returned from their first mission trip and they want to tell Jesus all about it, how they preached repentance, cast out demons and healed the sick. But they can’t get a word in. People are everywhere, coming and going, trying to get near Jesus.

They are hungry and thirsty for the presence of the Word made flesh. And they will not be denied. Jesus and the 12 try to escape by boat to a quiet place. But the people get there ahead of them. And now Jesus feels a yearning in his gut, the piercing twinge of compassion as he looks on this crowd that awaits him, defenseless as sheep against the hounds of hell.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. His yearning to act, to feed them with the bread of life and the real bread of the earth, meets their need to be fed. The lectionary does not give us the full story that follows; 5,000 were fed, likely many more, by five loaves of bread and two fish. And not just fed, but filled, satisfied. I tell you, after that meal the crowd was probably as quiet as the gathering at my grandma’s house after Thanksgiving dinner.

What a blessed day!

That night, Jesus walked on the water, joined the apostles in their boat and landed on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Once again, the people were waiting. Only now there was a hunger and thirst for healing. It moved like an electric charge through the whole region. On the roadside, in the marketplace, wherever Jesus went, the sick were laid on mats. He could hear them begging to touch his cloak because they’d heard about the woman in Capernaum, the one who had been bleeding for 12 years and who had said to herself: “If I just touch his clothes, I will be made well.” (Mark 5:28)

And she did. And he felt power going out of him. And she was healed, made well, restored and saved.

They knew that story. And so they called out, begging, pleading: “Pass me not, O gentle Savior. Hear my humble cry. While on others thou art calling. Do not pass me by.” And the scripture says that just like the woman in Capernaum, those who touched his cloak were healed, restored and made well.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for the righteous, restorative presence of God in Jesus Christ, for they will be satisfied.

That hunger and thirst are still with us. Why else would our mission team travel 3,000 miles to Guatemala to bring about a little justice, a little righteousness, a small glimpse of the Kingdom of God made real in the privacy of a latrine?

Why else did our bishops assemble daily during General Convention to call us to pray for sensible laws that might stem the staggering toll of gun violence that strikes down nearly 100 men, women and children every day in our country?

There is a hunger and thirst in our land for justice and righteousness that is not hamstrung by political ideologies of the right or left, but is rooted in the gospel, the good news of God's love and desire for the world revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Why else would a dozen bus-loads of faithful Christians leave the comfort of their air-conditioned hotels in Austin on a blistering hot Texas day to travel 30 miles so they could stand in an empty field by the Hutto Detention Center and shout and sing in hopes that the hundreds of women behind the concrete walls -- refugees and mothers separated from their children -- would know they are not alone and forgotten, but that outside those walls are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, people who are yearning to be filled?

Yes, there is a great hunger and thirst in our land and in our world. One that requires the help of each and every one of us before it can be satisfied. Jesus can't do it alone. Today's gospel tells us that. In the feeding of the 5,000, the disciples seem stunned when Jesus says: "You give them something to eat." (Mark 6:37) Nevertheless, they are commissioned to do what needs to be done. And they get to work.

The sick at Gennesaret do not come on their own. They are carried on mats. They are set in the marketplace. The community brings them, almost as if they were holy offerings, waiting to be transformed by the power of God the Father and God the Son. We hear an echo of this in our Rite I Eucharistic Prayers where we read: "And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies."

The gospel promises that all will be satisfied, that one day all will be made well, that Death will be no more, that mourning, crying, pain, injustice and poverty will be no more. And God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. One day. But not today.

Today, I still hunger and thirst. Oh, I have my times of fulfillment and a deep spiritual satisfaction. Yet, I still hunger and thirst for righteousness, for a right relationship with myself, my loved ones, my God and my world. But this is no reason to stop. As Bishop Curry likes to say: "Don't you get weary, but let your hearts be strong, because there's a great camp meeting waiting on the other side."

I had a holy encounter this week with four women from history, each of whom in her own way hungered and thirsted for righteousness: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sojourner Truth, Amelia Jenks Bloomer and Harriet Tubman. We celebrated them Friday during our communion service at Bay Woods.

You all probably know bits and pieces of their stories, the escape from slavery, the campaigns for women's suffrage, the Moses of Maryland making her 19 trips to the Eastern Shore. They were bold and tenacious fighters for justice who experienced times in their lives when their hunger and thirst was satisfied, but not wholly, not completely. None lived to see women win the right to vote. Yet, that did

not stop them. Here's what Stanton, who bore seven children, said in her final days: "My only regret is that I have not been braver and bolder and truer in the honest conviction of my soul."

Where then, brothers and sisters, is your hunger? Where, then, is your thirst?

Amen.

Delivered by the Rev. M. Dion Thompson

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