

HANGRY
BLC – B. HULL SOMERS – 8.5.18

Exodus 16:2-4 & 9-15, Ephesians 4:1-16, John 6:24-35

If I do not eat, I become a lesser version of myself and that's putting it mildly. When I have not eaten for a while, my temper gets shorter, my attention span becomes worthless and my patience wears very, very thin. The technical term for this is hangry. This is a smash up of the words – hungry and angry. It is true for me, when my blood sugar gets too low, the whole bottom falls out of my personality.

It does not take long, however, once I am eating something, for the feeling to go away. I have been told that it looks like a cloud lifts off of me as I eat – the monster turning back into a pleasant, albeit a little odd, middle aged woman again.

This morning's texts speak to a kind of hanger – spiritual hanger – a spiritual anemia that steals peace, joy and compassion. Much like the hypoglycemic type, this hanger comes from not getting enough of what we truly need – holy nourishment. Communion with God. It comes from feasting on fear and greed rather than grace and love.

The Israelites in our Old Testament story this morning were freshly liberated from Egypt. They had been held captive and enslaved, for generations during which time they were oppressed and used, beaten and scorned as second class citizens.

When Moses initially liberated them after a long ordeal of miracles and curses culminating in the parting of the Red Sea, they were so grateful. They were giddy. They had dreamt and prayed for that day for so long. They had fantasized about the Promised Land – the land of milk and honey and rainbows and no bad days. It had become something that kept them going through the pain and suffering and dehumanization of their captivity.

But something happened after a few days in the wilds of the desert. Reality butted into their fantasies, and they realized that this new-found freedom was not exactly what they had hoped for. They had sustained themselves on the hope of the perfect Promised Land, not a lame backpacking adventure with too little food and no decent footwear.

They were in an unfamiliar place with unfamiliar food and unfamiliar freedom. And they were not impressed.

They missed their regular meals, the only home they ever knew and the predictability of their former life.

It is easy to judge them from the comfort of thousands of years later. After all, if we had seen those amazing miracles, and if we had been liberated from our oppressors into a 40 year long backpacking excursion – we would be grateful! We wouldn't complain! We never complain when our lives do not turn out like the fantasies we imagined. We never get overwhelmed by uncomfortable freedom.

The Gospel was not much different. The folk had just been fed with the miracle of bread and fish. They had just had their bellies filled by Jesus and they were ready to see more. They were not ready to commit, you see. To believe that Jesus was the Son of God was scary. It would put them into an unmoored spirituality. It was not in line with their fantasy of a warrior king savior who would obliterate their enemies. And they were uncomfortable with freedom. They were accustomed to rules and regulations, sacrifices and circumcisions – strict, safe, predictable. To follow Jesus was to let go of all the generations of certainty and enter into mystery, love and adventure.

When they asked Jesus for signs and assurances it was simply to ensure that they did not leave behind safety and security. They were interested, sure, they were fascinated but they wanted more.

Jesus' answer to their queries most likely served to just confuse them more – which he loved to do. He called them out, telling them they were only there because they had benefited from a miracle and eaten their fill. They knew their Hebrew Scriptures and the stories of their people however, so they countered with, “Yes but Moses fed our ancestors Manna in the wilderness as they were being ushered into the Promised Land.” There was a precedence for being fed daily. Jesus shot back with, “I am the bread of life whomever believes in me will never hunger or thirst again.”

Jesus did not give them a religious checklist; he did not give them a specific uniform or address or anything so specific to cling to. He told them believe. Trust. Love. That's it.

It would have been so much easier if he would have just doubled down on the Ten Commandments. But, no. Remember that when Jesus was put into a corner and asked point blank about the law and prophets he responded with simply, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Believe. Trust. Love. Never hunger again.

This is uncomfortable territory. Jesus is inviting them and us to look at spiritual nourishment in a different way... in a way that is sustained not by practice or regulation but by embracing the presence of God.

The ancient Israelites in the desert were given a similar message. They were reliant on the daily provision that came in the quail and manna – if they tried to save the extra for the

next day it would immediately rot. They had to rely and be sustained by the daily presence and provision of the Most High.

Believe. Trust. Love.

We are not on a 40 year extended backpacking trip. We have not recently seen Jesus feed thousands with the miracle of the bold generosity of the few. But we are spiritually hangry.

We rely on what we can see and know for sure rather than trusting God for God's Kingdom promises. We prefer rules and doctrine over the disconcerting freedom we have been given in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We want answers, not mystery. We want to stock our spiritual pantries for a rainy day so that we do not have to do the raw, messy, scary work of abiding in the presence of God every day, every moment.

These are terrifying times. California is burning to the ground. There is an Orca mommy just a few miles away carrying the corpse of her baby for days as the Orca population dwindles from the environmental disasters humans have created. Children are dying in federal detention centers. People equate Christianity with harsh judgment and small mindedness for good reason. We are so overfed with things we don't need that obesity is one of the leading causes of death in our country while children in other lands literally starve!

We are hangry for the presence of God. We have been going far too long through the motions without the life-sustaining presence of the Most High.

So, where can we go to get nourished? Where can we find the bread of life to never hunger or thirst again?

Well, to start: right here. Everywhere. Once we realize how connected we are to God we can know and TRUST AND BELIEVE and love to live daily in the grace of God.

As Richard Rohr puts it, “Place does not exist except in God. There is no time outside God. God is the beauty in all beauty. Those who allow divine friendship enjoy divine friendship, and it is almost that simple. God’s life and love flow through you as soon as *you* are ready to allow it. That is the core meaning of faith—to dare to trust that God could, will, and does have an eternal compassion toward you.”

St. Ignatius put it more simply, “Those who have God in their hearts carry heaven wherever they go.”

The feast is here – wherever we are – because Jesus is the bread of life and God is with us. There is no reason to be spiritually hangry. We can allow the mystery and love of Jesus to bring us into new, nourished life. Pray. Read the Word. Spend time in worship. Spend time in silence. Create something beautiful. Enjoy the beauty of creation. Love when it is hard. Love when it is easy. Love. Serve others. Forgive. Stand up for the dehumanized. Fight evil. Hug a friend. Smile at a stranger. Bless your enemies. Pray. Give yourself grace.

Feast on the bread of life and never be hungry again. Amen.

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