

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Responding to Hunger"
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9th Sunday after Pentecost

Just let me welcome our VOWR listeners and those who receive this message over the Internet. It's good to have you with us, and I do hope you will take seriously what God is saying to you as you listen to Him.

Each of us knows when we individually are hungry. One of the first things an infant learns in this world is when they want to be fed. And we are them. Now of course we have lots of choice how we respond to our hungers. That choice is the subject of today's sermon.

We can just say "no" to our hunger. This option of fasting is not often used in places where food is as abundant as it is here. Fasting takes us to a spiritual place that the Bible encourages as a place of talking with God, of refocusing. Fasting and prayer can help us. But I will have to leave this topic of fasting for some other day.

Most of us do not respond to our hunger by saying "no." We usually say "yes." Nutritionists, physicians, scientists, mom and dad, spouses, our children all have something to tell us about how we eat. There are many debates about fat and sugar, salt and meat. Some say some form of vegetarianism is the answer. Others say whatever you do, do in moderation. Some strongly counsel multi vitamins. Others disagree. Some taut the blessings of caffeinated beverages, others say the opposite...and so on; and so on.

Being aware of your hunger, of what is actually going on inside you, you might think is the key to all healthy diets. And it is. Secondly, you might think that how you respond to your hunger is another vital part of managing what goes into your body as fuel. This is true as well. Third, being aware of how others affect your eating habits is also a big part of determining how you will continue or change in your habits.

On top of all this is the fact that most of us eat without reference to hunger or need. In fact, we rather rarely know the pangs of hunger since we can eat almost anything at almost anytime in the day or in the night.

Eating then becomes mainly a pleasure, with little regard for nutrition or nutritional balance. And we wonder why so many of us are obese or larger.

I believe many of us experience a disconnect with our own hunger. Many of us no longer know when we are hungry. We eat at certain times no matter what. We snack or eat recreationally. Some of us no longer eat in community, that is, with at least one other person. We can go to a restaurant alone. We can choose to not seek anyone else out for a meal. Eating is a communal activity that has happened since the beginning of human civilization, perhaps before that.

Eating together forms us and informs us. Our meals are the last remnants of family. In a *Time* magazine article from June 4, 2006, we hear of researchers saying families rarely eat together. And while twelve year olds will eat almost seven suppers with the family a week, seventeen year olds will more likely drop to two suppers per week or less. Many families report eating together three to four times a week, and even then only in front of the TV.

It is no wonder in our changing culture, that we have little time for one another or God; if the family meal is one litmus test.

When people looked for Jesus and his teaching in an isolated place in John 6, they had heard of his healing power and other miracles. They knew he was leading people to God and amazing things were happening. So they followed him out into isolated places. One such place had a hill, and a lot of grass (read lawn, not marijuana). But people were either too poor to bring enough food or simply too drawn to the Lord to plan for appropriate picnicking materials. In either case, they were not complaining about food as the Israelites had done in the desert. No, they were just there. It was Jesus who recognized that they had been out all day and probably had had nothing to eat. In those days, it was more likely a fact that people were barely getting by nutritionally day by day. So Jesus was simply thinking practically and pastorally when he asked his disciples how much food it would take to feed a crowd of at least ten thousand, since the five thousand number counted only the men. Philip mostly like read the scene correctly when he suggests that six months wages would not be enough to give each one a scrap of bread. And that assumes there is a bakery or someone in the area that could provide food for ten thousand people. In other texts or in

other similar situations, the disciples urge the Lord to dismiss the crowd and look after their own problem of hunger.

But here Jesus rightly recognizes hunger as a serious problem and so does Philip. What Philip does not know or any of the disciples or any of the people at that point is Jesus' answer to the predicament.

And here is where we must learn, if we are going to listen to what God has for us in our lives. Jesus often has an answer to a difficult or impossible situation in our lives, if we will only listen to what he has to say. If we do so, we may see miracles and amazing answers from the Lord. Of course, if we do not seek the Lord's advice, or if we don't want to listen, then we remain stuck in our impossible or nearly impossible situations.

Jesus directs the disciples to make everyone sit down. They do. If you've been to a hockey game or a sports event with ten thousand people, you get a sense for how big a project like simply getting the people to sit without a public address system can be. But they sit. And Jesus takes what one boy had probably brought as their family meal, two fish and five loaves.

Also I don't care much for those scholars who say the one boy opened up his lunch box and everyone else did as well. This simply ignores the text in favor of preconceptions against miracles. No, Jesus takes the food and everyone in the ten thousand person crowd has their fill. In fact, the Scripture says everyone eats as much as they like. You get the impression there was quite a feast. At the end, the crowd understands what has happened and tries to force Jesus to be their political king, which might have been a temptation for Jesus, except that the devil already offered him this position and he turned it down.

No, what is interesting here is that the people's hunger is met even without asking the Lord. And once it is met, the people want this over and over again with someone like Jesus as King, prime minister or president.

So the question is not so much how their hunger is filled. The question is how do they respond to their hunger?

That question is put to us as well. Do we expect to live our lives in such a way as to only meet our own needs and move on? Do we consider asking the Lord what he would do with our hunger? Now we have a tradition that

as we are about to satisfy our hunger, we return thanks through a prayer, sometimes short, sometimes long, sometimes memorized, sometimes spontaneous. We do so to place the Lord in the center of our hunger. We say in the Lord's Prayer to give us this day our daily bread, our daily food. And if we are wise we turn to Agur's prayer in Proverbs 30:7ff; "not too much, Lord or I may forget you; and not too little or I may turn to crime to satisfy my hunger and dishonor your name." But each of us needs to learn how to recognize our hunger and respond appropriately, involving Jesus in the process.

Otherwise we may run into the same problem King David did. Instead of being on the battlefield, which was his calling from God, he was looking for trouble from his penthouse suite, without even having the internet. He found a desirable woman, slept with her. She became pregnant, and then he went to great lengths to try to cover it up by bringing her husband home from battle to sleep with her. But the soldier was more righteous than the king and finally the king had him killed in battle to cover up his adultery.

You know there are many strange complexities to this story such as the fact that the king already had multiple wives. But the simple truth is that he was not doing what he was called to do by God and responded to his sexual hunger in an inappropriate way. Today two consenting adults seemingly are allowed to do whatever they want. But the consequences of sexual encounters between just about anyone is wreaking havoc in our society and we no longer even know what to say to young people and others except "keep safe." Of course, illicit sex has many continuing STDs as a reminder that there are consequences, but besides this we are commanded to stop and think about how we respond to all our hungers, not just food, but sex and substances, drugs, alcohol, workaholic tendencies, consumerism, codependency, control issues, the list goes on and on.

If we do not stop and ask God for mercy as we respond to our hungers; we will continue the self-destructive path of obesity, addiction, patterns of control (not self control) and blaming rather than accepting responsibility for our actions. Today is a good day to stop and consider anew what God is saying to you about your hungers. And if we can help in the church or by recommending counselors or others to you, then give us a call.

First we need to acknowledge our need. Then ask and receive. With this in mind, let us pray.