

“Satisfied With Being Unsatisfied”
Matthew 5:6 – March 6, 2016

INTRO: It is said that a working person in Palestine in Jesus’ day, probably “ate meat only once a week. And the day laborer was never far from the border-line of real hunger and actual starvation. It was even more so in the case of thirst. For the vast majority of people, it was not possible to turn a tap and find clear, cold water pouring into their house.” (William Barclay) Imagine living with those realities day after day, and hearing Jesus speak these words.

Mid-February, as the Lenten season was beginning to roll around, along came the newspaper’s yearly list of Milwaukee area church and non-profit fish fry dinners. There were 15 listed for Milwaukee County, but the number is greater than that, because these were just the ones who responded to the newspaper’s request. And one of the closer venues for us, at Saints Constantine & Helen, the Greek Orthodox church up the street, wasn’t even on the list.

Then, maybe a week later, the paper published an article, “Seven Fish Fries Worth Reeling In.” You know you’re in Wisconsin when fish fries constitute the news! They described in detail what you could expect to find in these establishments in Grafton, Mequon, Waukesha, Hales Corners, Tosa—along with photos—really appetizing photos. You looked at those pictures and read the descriptions, and just knew you needed to try them out. A meal that looked wonderful was at the Jail House Restaurant clear up in Jackson. But I have a friend in West Bend, so it was about half way in between for us. We met there one Wednesday evening. I had been looking forward to the mashed cauliflower ever since I read about that dish in the paper, only to find that the cauliflower makes an appearance just on weekends. But, OK, they had fresh asparagus, and it was great. And the fish were hot and tasty but I realized the two hours my friend and I spent in conversation, was the best part of the meal. Yes, we needed something to eat, but we also needed companionship.

We have many basic human needs.. Jesus spoke about something very real for all people, the need for food and water, to help explain the other needs we have as well—to help get to the idea that we have other hungers. The people to whom Jesus spoke, “lived in an agrarian society, their lives intimately tied to nature. They grew their food or hunted or fished the land and waters around them. Drought meant possible starvation. They lived on the edge of the desert, in constant risk of thirst and famine.” (Mary Lou Redding)

“Jesus applied their experience of hunger and thirst to a spiritual need as real and great as physical nourishment. In our largely middle-class Western culture, saturated with food and drink of every kind, it is difficult to imagine the imperatives of hunger and thirst that so many people in this world know. Yet we have brief encounters that give us a taste of the full reality. Perhaps in our busyness we forget to eat a meal, and pangs of hunger begin to stab at us. Perhaps in the preparation and aftermath of surgery we experience the cotton-dry mouth and parched throat of thirst.” (The Way of Blessedness)

If we take the idea of hungering and thirsting, not just for physical nourishment, but for spiritual nourishment, we are getting closer to where Jesus was going with this.

“Hungering and thirsting for righteousness means being aware that more exists than our eyes see, than our bodies need. It means knowing that we need a relationship with God and recognizing that time spent with God feeds us. It means hungering for something better than the status quo. (Righteousness), the word Jesus used means ‘to be in right relationship with God and other people.’ (And I know righteousness sounds like a churchy word, one we may struggle to understand. But if we can just remember it basically means a right relationship—with God & others, we’ve pretty much got it.) To open ourselves to God and acknowledge our hunger for righteousness, means opening ourselves to be changed, to have our affections and our actions changed. When we are disappointed in ourselves for our inability to be better and to do better, we are feeling our hunger and thirst for righteousness (a right relationship). In fact, (it could be) that our vague, unsatisfied, and unsatisfiable yearnings are in some way at their root the yearning to know God, to be put right with God, and to see the world put right with God.” (Mary Lou Redding)

“God designed our spiritual hunger and thirst into us; they are a part of the original specifications for being fully human. We may ignore our hungers or try to satisfy them by a thousand means other than turning to God. We may keep our calendars so full that we don’t have time to ask our-

selves if we are deeply happy, if life has meaning. But that will not make the hungers go away. They are a permanent part of us at the deepest level of our being.” (Mary Lou Redding)

“Righteousness is not first and foremost a matter of living in a state of blessed detachment from the world’s wonders and hassles and challenges. It is a matter of discerning what it means to be right with God in the very midst of them.” (Erik Kolbell)

“The story goes that the Buddha was down at the river’s edge when a young man approached him and asked him what he needed to do to attain enlightenment. Without saying a word, Buddha took the man by the hand, thrust his head under the water, and held it there until just before he was ready to pass out. He then lifted the man out of the water, and said to him, ‘In those last few moments, what were you thinking about?’ ‘I was thinking about air,’ the man said, gasping for breath. ‘Anything else?’ the Buddha asked. ‘No,’ the man answered, ‘I was just thinking about air; my life depended on it.’ ‘Precisely. When you can turn your attention only to the eternal truth as if your life depended on it,’ Buddha told him, ‘you will be on the path to enlightenment.’” (Erik Kolbell)

“What Buddha wanted to know was what the young man desired above all else, what he hungered and thirsted for so intently that anything else was a pale pretender. To paraphrase Richard Neibuhr, know the answer to this question, and you’ll know what your god looks like.” (Erik Kolbell)

“We feel empty, but feeling has little to do with being empty.” (Maggie Ross)

“We feel empty because we are full of the wrong stuff.” (James Howell)

“God fashioned the hollowness inside us, not as an evil to be cured, but as the most marvelous gift. We need to keep wanting more of God. The beauty is in the hungering, in the yearning. The nagging hankering we feel inside is God’s voice, calling us home, keeping us a bit ‘restless until we find rest in God.’” (James Howell)

Leslie Stahl is a longtime journalist and correspondent. She became well known after she covered Watergate. She went on to become White House correspondent through three presidencies. She was the face on the “Evening News.” She served as moderator of “Face the Nation” for 8 years. And for 26 seasons, she has been a correspondent on “60 Minutes.” Her work has taken her all over the world, and put her on the front lines of some of the world’s most important stories. Stahl has interviewed countless heads of state, from U.S. presidents to Margaret Thatcher, to Boris Yeltsin. (biography.com)

She wrote a book seventeen years ago, entitled *Reporting Live*. And she has a book coming out this spring, entitled *Becoming Grandma*. I don’t know about you, but I didn’t see that one coming. Here is this famous, professional woman, known world-wide for the work she has done to bring us the news, and at age 74, we see a side to her we might not have expected. Her first grandchild was born 5 years ago. She said “I was jolted, blindsided by a wallop of loving more intense than anything I could remember or had ever imagined. When it was Leslie’s turn to hold the baby, she said, “I felt I was growing a whole new chamber in my heart. This is what I didn’t expect. I was at a time in my life where I’d assumed I had already had my best day, my tallest high. But now I was overwhelmed with euphoria.” (AARP *The Magazine*, F/M16)

Leslie’s life was very full—she had had so many experiences, she has enjoyed a fair degree of fame, she and her husband have a daughter, and along comes this first granddaughter, followed a few years later by a second granddaughter. And here’s Leslie finding out that there was still an empty space in her life, a space to be filled by these children.

Our lives may be busy, filled with many things to do, people to care for, calendars to tend, goals to achieve. And we may say we’ve had our best day, our biggest achievement, or not, but there still may be something missing. “There’s a Peanuts cartoon in which Charlie Brown begins a letter to his pen pal by saying, ‘I would have written sooner, but I forgot about you.’ Many of us could begin a letter to our spiritual selves with those words. Our culture makes it possible for us to keep our lives so busy that we can ignore spiritual hunger and thirst. Though our calendars may be full to overflowing, we can remain empty and unsatisfied.” (Mary Lou Redding)

So, we come to this table today—and maybe we come hungry, “hungry beyond description for the presence of the Lord, for meaning and purpose, for goodness and life. We are handed just a fragment of bread and just a tiny dip of wine. Just enough to make us want more. And more.” (James Howell)

And that desire, a desire for God—is a very good hunger to have.

--Sue Burwell