

Feeding Our Hunger
Psalm 63: 1-8
March 7, 2010

A newscast several years ago reported two facts that seem to contradict each other. First, it was reported that Americans are more fat-conscious than ever before. Every food product we buy has nutritional information clearly printed on the label, including how many grams of fat and cholesterol are in each serving. We also have an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the role of such things in our health, or in our lack thereof.

But the second fact that was reported turned the first one on its head. At the same time that we are becoming more-fat conscious, obesity rates in America are reaching unprecedented levels. In fact, the problem has gotten so bad that just this week I heard one health expert say that obesity is the number one health epidemic in our country.

How could it be that we know so much about what makes for healthy living and yet still kill ourselves? It is testimony to the fact that the temptation to consume what is not good for us is always in front of us. A healthy diet requires forethought and planning and discipline. By contrast, the drive through requires five bucks and three minutes. And have you ever noticed how the candy bars are always displayed at a three year old's eye level in the check out line? Every day we are bombarded with the invitation to gorge ourselves on junk.

And I am not just talking about food. In fact, our entire culture is built around the assumption of consumption. It is assumed that the more we consume, the better off we are. We measure our economic health, for example, by watching certain indicators such as how many cars were produced last quarter, or how many TVs were purchased last month. But when do we ever get around to asking how many cars or TVs we really need? Making the problem worse, of course, is that we have insatiable appetites. Not only does our culture make stuff readily available to be consumed; our hungers for it are never fully satisfied. Have you ever noticed how we always want just a little bit more? We chase after that "thing" that we just have to have. Maybe it's a raise or a new possession or a new position at work. It feels good for a while, but soon we find that we are hungry for something else and we strike out after more.

At one of our recent Wednesday night conversations on economic simplicity, we discussed the fact that back in the 1950's the average home built in America was about 1300 square feet in size with a one car garage. Today the average home built in America is roughly 2400 square feet with a three car garage. And even that increase in size is not sufficient to hold all the stuff we have accumulated, so today across this country we have over 9 billion square feet of self storage space available to rent.

Yet does anyone want to argue that as a society we feel healthier and better off? If things are so much better than they were 50 years ago, why do we still drink so much? Why do over half of all marriages fail?

Why is pornography available on every street corner? Why is government gridlocked by distrust and division? Why do the demands of life feel so unmanageable? Clearly, having more does not equate with being well.

The point is not to hearken back to the good ole' days of the 1950's when life was simpler and people were purer, because when it comes to human consumption there were no good ole' days. As long as human beings have walked this planet we have tended to stuff ourselves on things cannot give us life. Writing thousands of years before the age of fast food, cheap electronics, and easy credit the prophet Isaiah asked the people of Israel a very basic question: "*Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?*" Why do we chase after things that cannot feed the hunger that is deepest inside us?

This portion of the book of Isaiah was written to a group of Israelites who had been carried away into exile after the Babylonians captured Judah, an exile that lasted for about 70 years. You can only imagine that being dragged away from your home and forced to start life over in an unfamiliar land would be a painful thing, especially in the early years when the memories of home were still so fresh.

But an interesting thing happened over time. The Israelites gradually began to prosper in exile, especially in comparison to those who were left behind in the now desolate land of Judah. Those left back home were struggling to survive, but those who had been carried off to Babylon actually began to make a comfortable life for themselves. They built homes and planted gardens and began to accumulate a small amount of wealth.

But along the way they also began to forget who they were. Babylon was not their home, and though God had sent them there for a time, they were never meant to get too comfortable. There was nothing wrong with homes and gardens per se, but there was something terribly wrong with losing their identity. They were God's people, and their greatest desire, their greatest need was to be in His presence.

For them at that stage in the history of God's people, that specifically meant the Temple in Jerusalem. *That* is where God was most present to them; *that* is where their hungers and their desires were to be focused. Anything else, anything less, was bound to leave them unfulfilled. They could chase after all the prosperity they wanted, and it would never satisfy their deepest hunger, because God never meant for it to do so. Their lives were meant to be fed by a different source.

Obviously, we are not ancient Israelites, so the Temple no longer means to us what it meant to them. But the hunger they were chasing after still does. The reason we are never fully satisfied with the things we consume is because God never meant for it to. God created us to be in fellowship with Him. *That* is the reason we exist. God did not bring humanity into existence because he was lonely or because he needed anything from us. He created us because it was His great desire to share himself with us. And because that desire of his is embedded into our spiritual DNA, nothing short of him will ever truly satisfy us. There is something within us

that is designed to meet with God, and whether we recognize it or not we will be unsatisfied so long as that so long as that hunger is unfed.

This morning we consider another Psalm of David – Psalm 63. It begins with two simple, yet profound words. “O God.” In today’s culture those words are usually thought of as swear words, but in the context of Scripture those two words represent the most primitive and basic cry of the human soul. One commentator has said that these two words are where all spiritual formation begins. Before we formulate doctrines, before we argue theology, before we confess sins, before we begin any formal training as disciples, we must first learn to cry these two words: “O God!” We must learn to recognize our deep need of him.

David had learned to cry these two words. Out in the desert, on the run from King Saul, deprived of family and friends and all worldly comforts, David had learned that his most basic need was for the presence of God. And just as importantly, he had learned that the provisions for that need were available in abundant supply. In rich, poetic language, David described the reality of God’s presence as though it were a rich banquet that satisfied not only body but soul as well. David found the promise of God’s presence to be enough to sustain him even when his circumstances were bleak.

As I said last week, sometimes the language of the Psalms can sound like empty piety. This is the language of spiritual poetry, and we do not tend to talk in these terms. But ask yourself this question. What is that sounds empty? A man seeks for God to satisfy his soul like water in the desert, or a person who seeks only after the stuff that this world offers to us? We already know what the latter leads to: obesity – not just physical obesity, but spiritual obesity. Our own experience tells us that the endless pursuit of more and more just leaves us feeling sluggish and unsatisfied.

But what if we could learn to understand that dissatisfaction as a clue towards the very meaning of our existence? What if we could learn to interpret our hunger as a sign toward what we were created to experience? We were created by God for God. Nothing else will satisfy.

David said that in seeking God he found that his soul was satisfied with the richest of foods. This morning that proves to be more than just a figure of speech, because we gather around the table to share a rich meal. By worldly standards it is a very simple meal – just some bread and wine. But these simple elements represent for us the richest offer in the world, for they point us to the very presence of God. For us the Temple is not the embodiment of God’s presence; Jesus is. In the person of Jesus we have God himself. In his death and resurrection, Christ offered his very self to us. He did not come to give us only ideas or concepts or principles or teachings. He came to give us himself. He came to feed us on the very bread of life, which is Christ our Lord.

If you are hungry or thirsty this morning; if you know that your soul is not satisfied; if there is some kind of yearning within you that perhaps you cannot even describe, then good. It means that God is calling you toward himself. Even better than that, he promises to feed you with himself. Come to the table. Come and be satisfied.