

Exodus 16:2-20

Satisfy Your Hunger

A group of guys—I'd say in their mid-20s and 30s—are playing backyard tackle football when strangely this old lady—played by Betty White—lines up as a receiver. No one watching the commercial is surprised when she does horribly on the next play. Walking back to the huddle her teammates are all upset because she isn't playing well. Then she gets upset and has some not-so-kind words. Quickly someone from the stand comes over and tells the old lady, "Here eat this." After one bite the individual transforms into a younger guy, "Feel better?" he is asked. The tag line is then heard: "You're not you when you are hungry. Grab a Snickers."

You either know it from personal experience or you know someone who is like that: they just aren't themselves when they are hungry. T-shirts and online posts have the phrase: "Don't judge me for what I say or do, I'm hungry." Or, you might have heard that term, "hangry"; someone is angry because they are hungry. Babies scream for it; children and teens moan and groan, "Uh, I'm hungry!!!" Adults become impatient and irritable waiting for it. When those pains of hunger set in, we can be on a one-track mind: give me food! Or, as *Snickers* put it so well, "You're not you when you are hungry."

But we can be hungry for more than just that sustenance to survive. One might be hungry—have a strong desire, almost craving—for a job promotion, hunger for a certain status, hunger to have certain life goals fulfilled by a certain time, hunger to be liked by other people, hunger to be loved, etc. So where does being hungry for God's Word fit in? All too easily does the balance tip and priorities fall to fulfilling the hunger for physical things while being fed by God's Word and Sacrament doesn't receive enough attention. From the Israelites in Exodus 16 today we learn how God gives us physical food, satisfies our earthly hunger of various things, to point us to him.

It had only been about a month since the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt. They had watched God send the 10 plagues on the Egyptians. They knew how God saved them from the angel of death that killed all the firstborn in Egypt. They watched the waters of the Red Sea split open and then walked along the dry ground. They had witnessed the power of God in very visible ways. But now they are in this desert and they have run out of food. It would be an understatement to say this didn't sit well with them. This isn't just a few whiners that come to Moses and Aaron; the whole community grumbled against them. "It would have been better if we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt!" they said. For these hungry people, all of the suffering, the bitter hard burden of slavery, and the brutality of Egypt was better than what they were dealing with right now. At least in Egypt there was food to eat!

The Israelites had been set free from slavery and God promised to take them to the Promised Land. He promised to take care of them. But here they are, only thirty days out, and they are starving and seemingly couldn't find any answers. Maybe they feel like they shouldn't have gotten their hopes up. Or, it's possible they are feeling betrayed. Whatever it is the fact remains that in their impatience and ingratitude, the people did not trust God's plan or his promises. And so, they took it out on God's servants Moses and Aaron.

When reading the Old Testament, I am often struck with how much I am like those Israelites. But it's not all that surprising. The sinful, distrusting nature of the Israelites is the same one that is in each of us. None talk more absurdly and have a more forgetful memory than complainers and people who grumble. When those things that we hunger for—status, positions, financial stability, reputation, food, nice things—aren't in our possession, how quickly we focus on the things we don't have while at the same time forget the blessings God has given. How quickly one can start feeling like no one—even God—cares about them, when life isn't going the way we have planned or would like. Even when we know better, we sometimes can't seem to help feeling this way.

So what does God do with those Israelites? First he sets his people straight. Through Moses and Aaron, God explains that really the Israelites weren't complaining against them. Who are Moses and Aaron but servants who God placed over the people? No, who they are complaining against is God. The same God who led them out of Egypt, who sent those plagues, who split the Red Sea, that's who they are complaining against. Really, they were telling God, "You aren't doing a good enough job. You are doing something wrong." This is an important thing to keep in mind for yourself when beginning to be uneasy and agonize over things, wanting to grumble and complain. We need to remember and consider the fact that God hears all our murmurings, even if they aren't said out loud, and it is against him that you are grumbling and complaining.

But even in the midst of all the grumbling and complaining, when the people had sinned against him and not trusted him, in love and mercy God still provides for his people. In v.12 through Moses the Lord tells Israel, "**At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread.**" And that's exactly what he does. In a miraculous way quail came and covered the camp. There was no need to go out hunting; these birds simply were there for the people to take. In the morning, when the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost—something like hoarfrost that covers the trees in winter—appeared on the ground. It was something they had never seen before, in fact they asked each other "**What is it?**" because they did not know. This was bread from heaven—bread the Lord gave to his people to eat—bread they called "manna" which means, "What is it?"

God does not send us manna in the morning to gather for that day's meal. He doesn't send quail in the evening for us to eat (although it would make grocery trips a lot easier). But God still provides for his people. When we confess in the Apostles Creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty maker of heaven and earth," we confess and believe that he provides us with the talents we use, the ability to do work, the jobs that we have. We confess that he works through these means so that we are daily and fully provided for all that we need for body and life. In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." As we know from his Word and our lives, God gives that the bread even without our prayer, even to all the wicked. And as stated in the Catechism concerning this petition: **We pray in this petition that he would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.** For God does this—giving of daily bread, providing for us—only because he is our good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because we have earned it or deserved it (as we confess in the First Article). Because God cares for his people, because he loves you, he provides and takes care of us and satisfies our hungers.

But he doesn't just do this to fulfill the hunger for the physical needs—even wants—of his people. He does this so that we will know the Lord.

Each day, except for on the Sabbath when they were to rest, the Israelites were to go out and gather enough food for that day. In this way, God told Moses, "**I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.**" As he did with Israel his people, so he does with us his people today. He gives us these physical, earthly things to test us and give us an opportunity to show him our love and to direct our eyes to him.

Too often and too easily our eyes stop at the physical. When we have our physical wants and needs fulfilled we can slip into this complacency and get too comfortable. We have our fill physically, but then too often neglect to feel that hunger for the spiritual food of God's Word. It's not always like that when life is difficult, when we feel like we are stretched too thin—you see it a lot of times in hospital rooms especially—there's often all these promises to be a better Christian, to be more involved, to be in the Word more and one is often more willing to recognize their need for help from God. But then when we are blessed, do we look to God for continued help? Do we continue to give him thanksgiving and praise? Do we still feel that hunger for him and his Word? We can be so forgetful and struggle to trust God's promises. But then to make matters worse, we can neglect what we need to have that faith fed and strengthened; that is, God's Word and Sacrament.

And still God continues to provide what we need to satisfy that spiritual hunger. In John 6, we learn that God has sent you and me, the world, the true bread from heaven to do just that. Jesus says in John 6:35, "**I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will**

never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Jesus is not talking about earthly, physical hunger or thirst. He is talking about being the bread who gives you eternal life. He did this because we were more than a little hungry, we were starving on our own. We weren't just dying from starvation; we were dead in our sin. The worst part is that when we are stuck in those sins we do not even realize when we are hungry or that we need to be saved. In fact when we are spiritually starving we can get used to it and convince ourselves we are completely fine and have no need for the Bread of Life; that is Jesus and his Word. And still, God, in his love and mercy, when we were stuck in our sins and sinful ways, hungry, famished, dead in sin, the Father sent the true bread from heaven, Jesus, to make us alive in him. It's Jesus who gives you eternal life having perfectly kept his priorities straight and always trusting God's plan and will; Jesus who died for your sins and rose again and gives you life with him through faith.

That same providing, loving Father continues to work to point your eyes to him so that you are fed with his spiritual food. And so he provides for you physically to test you and give you the chance to show him your love. Every time you give your offerings, you show God you trust he will provide for your physical needs. God doesn't need your money; he's giving you a chance to serve him. Every time you follow God's will instead of listening to the temptations of this world and your sinful nature, you show your trust in God's plan and promises. You aren't doing him any favors; God gives you a chance to follow his will. How we do this, how we are willing to do this, how you pass the test doesn't come from you deciding to do better or making any promises. It comes from being filled up with the right things. As you aren't you when you are physically hungry, so you aren't you when you are spiritually hungry. We wouldn't go six days without food, why would we think it's okay to go that long without the food of God's Word when it's the food that gives us eternal life? Hunger after that spiritual food of Word and Sacrament. It is given to sinners like you and me to feed our starving souls and sometimes weak faith. Come forward for the Lord's Supper to receive forgiveness of sins where Jesus feeds and strengthens your faith. Your loving and merciful Lord graciously provides you with everything you need for your daily life to remind you of his gracious love that his Son, Jesus, provides for your eternal life. Amen.