

When Jesus Nourishes You

“Fill your life with Christ.”

John 6:32-35

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Hunger

One time when we moved Laura kept the bread maker separate from all the things we had packed away and loaded on the moving truck. So, when we arrived at the new house in the middle of the night, she combined the ingredients for the dough in the machine and set the timer. When we awoke in the morning and the movers came, already the house was filling with the aroma of fresh, baking bread.

It filled the senses. At once it made the whole place feel more like home. And it made me incredibly...hungry. At the very least, you might say it awakened my awareness of my nutritional need.

Craving. The day after the presidential election in 2000 I listened to Daniel Shore's commentary on National Public Radio. He said, "Today America is at peace but not with itself; prosperous but not enjoying it."

That was said before the 9/11 terrorist attacks; the recession of 2001 and 2002, the resurgence of 2003, the crash of 2008/2009; and two long wars that still aren't over. It was when it seemed like just about everyone had a job, a promising retirement portfolio, and could purchase just about anything they wanted. I was driving past some new subdivisions as I listened and saw it: huge homes and expensive cars – the very picture of a society in which it seemed like more than just the upper crust simply had it made.

Abundance, yet: *at peace but not within, prosperous but not enjoying it.* Was that true? Was it like there an aroma in the air that filled the senses and awakened hunger, yet few people were actually finding the bread?

Jesus

One of people Laura and I visited while we were in South Africa was a white theologian by the name of Denise Ackerman. She and her husband had been active in the struggle against apartheid in the '70's and '80's and had paid dearly for it until the government changed and some of their losses were restored. In the course of sharing

her reflections and insights, there was something rather unsettling that she shared with us. She cited some study that had been done that measured the degree of happiness shared by nations of people against the amount of their material wealth. She said that the surprising conclusion of the study was that some of the less fortunate people were among the happiness, and some of the wealthiest were among the most miserable. She said that people in America were found to be among the most-unhappy in the world.

At peace but not within ourselves, prosperous but not enjoying it.

Many people grab for fulfillment with the accumulation of things and interesting experiences. And while these things seem to satisfy, maybe for a time, satisfaction slips away; and of hunger has a way of returning with a vengeance. Always, the need is for more.

Sensing the aroma of fresh baked bread, people keep chomping away at potato chips. “I bet you can’t eat just one.”

A crowd of people had forgotten themselves and their cravings for a moment to follow the young preacher to a desolate place. They listened intently until some began to complain that it was dinner time and they hadn’t even eaten lunch. So Jesus settled them down, thousands of them, and took the lunch of what appears to be the only person willing to share – a young boy who offered up a few little loaves of bread and a couple of fish – and blessed the food and gave it.

That’s who Jesus is. He’d been filling their lives all day with words that told them about God so they could know that in every instance God would fill their lives with exactly what they needed. There he was, showing them the connection they could have with God that would keep them fulfilled even in the face of brutality and starvation. He showed them the goodness of God by healing their brokenness and filling them with hope. Then, in response to their physical hunger he presented a metaphor to all he was saying by blessing the little bit of food he had in front of him and giving it to them.

Call it a miracle. I don’t know if the molecules multiplied or if stingy people decided to risk letting each other know what they’d been hiding all along and started sharing. It was a miracle either way. All I know is that when there had been nothing Jesus brought about more than enough.

Either way, it was a bigger miracle than the Israelites had experienced years before in the wilderness when they were hungry and woke up to find that the morning dew had changed into bread...every day of their long trek to the Promised Land.

Yet, the people present with Jesus didn't get it. They still couldn't understand that the real filling they received came in the words they heard before the physical miracle. They still didn't get it that the healing and the compassion that was the full blessing of God came because of the one who was giving it out.

They'd been given bread, but were still hooked on potato chips. They had experienced a moment of prosperity but had not enjoyed it.

They wanted more.

So Jesus told them straight out: "I AM." There's the name of God again as Jesus connects himself to the Holy One he was always pointing to and who had sent him. "I AM," (they must have shuddered when they heard the name that was so holy they weren't even allowed to say it out loud) "I AM the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

When do you think that Jesus nourishes you? When you finally get the job? When you pass the test? When the economy finally rebounds and your investments get healthy? When does Jesus fill your life?

Always.

Filling

On a visit at the United Methodist seminary at Boston University, I was waiting to visit some ministerial students – some who were from Michigan and others who might have had some interest in coming here. While I waited in the empty classroom, wondering how their minds and hearts were being prepared for leadership in the church, I noticed a chalkboard that had this message inscribed:

Jesus, I Love You Because...

- when I was depressed you gave joy.

- your love for me never, ever changes.
- when I cried out for guidance you came and guided my steps
- you brought me to where I am today, in total awe of you
- you showed me mercy when I didn't deserve it. You didn't turn away when everyone else deserted me.
- and you saved me!
- there could never be anyone else who fills me like you do.
- he loves me enough to wake me up at night to teach me more of him.
- you consider me your friend despite my many shortcomings.
- you teach me how I do not have to live this life because you live in me.
- Because you saved my life.
- you're in control when everything else isn't.
- because you are the great I AM!

I had my answer. Their house was filled with the aroma. They were being fed and they were being satisfied. And I thought to myself, "Here are the kinds of leaders we need for our church."

The aroma fills the house. Jesus is here. Always, with the Bread of Life that is out of this world.