

HUNGER

Exodus 16:1-12

The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days." So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we that you should grumble against us?" Moses also said, "You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD." Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.'" While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud. The LORD said to Moses, "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.'"

Isaiah 49:8-13

This is what the LORD says: "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' "They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water. I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up. See, they will come from afar— some from the north, some from the west, and some from the region of Aswan." Shout for joy, you heavens; rejoice, you earth; burst into song, you mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.

John 6:25-35

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you

saw the signs I performed, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat. ’” Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.” Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

MESSAGE:

The subject of today’s message is “hunger.” There are many different kinds of hunger. Some people like okra; some people don’t. People who don’t like okra don’t understand how ANYBODY *could* like okra, but the fact remains that some people do like okra.

Sometimes we hunger for things that aren’t very good for us. For some, it’s food with a lot of sugar in it; for some it’s food with a lot of salt in it. People hunger for things other than food that aren’t necessarily good for them either: things like drugs or alcohol or casual sex apart from marriage. We call those people addicts and we treat their addictions as diseases. I’m not sure but what addictions aren’t just extreme cases of self-destructive appetites we all have: all of us seem to have an appetite for some things that aren’t very good for us. It wasn’t that way originally.

God created Adam and Eve with appetites that were good for them—hunger for healthy food, hunger for companionship with other people, hunger for useful work to do, hunger for knowledge, hunger for a close relationship with God. And He gave them everything they needed to satisfy those appetites: food for their stomachs, each other to love, a garden to tend, knowledge of all that is good, and Himself as their eternal companion. That state of affairs was called paradise. But Satan spoiled it all by igniting a new kind of hunger in Eve: a hunger for the knowledge of evil.

The Scriptures describe this appetite for evil that was born in Eve in terms of a misbegotten hunger: *“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.”* When Adam and Eve gave in to the temptation to satisfy their hunger for the knowledge of evil, they unleashed all kinds of deadly appetites into the world. Instead of hungering to draw closer to God, people began to draw away from God and actually hide from Him. Instead of being satisfied with one mate, people began to hunger for sinful relationships with “disposable” mates. Instead of wanting to take care of God’s creation, people began to exploit it as if it belonged to them and they could do with it as they pleased; they began to think of themselves as the owners of creation rather than as stewards whom God had appointed to take care of creation.

The direct result of all these misbegotten appetites is that we now find ourselves hungering for things that can never satisfy us—worldly things rather than Godly things. We hunger to have power over each other rather than to serve each other in love. We hunger to own things and use them as we please rather than think of ourselves as stewards of what belongs to God. We hunger for the knowledge of evil rather than for the knowledge of what is good—as a glance at any newspaper will show. There’s an old saying among journalists about what kind of news sells newspapers that goes: *“If it bleeds, it leads.”* God will satisfy Godly appetites, but an appetite for worldly things will never be satisfied: it will only increase.

Today I’d like to take a look at three kinds of perverse hunger, consider the damage they do to our lives, and see what we can do about them.

First there is our hunger to exalt ourselves over our fellow man. We have a benign term for this hunger: we call it the desire to “win.” The desire to win is one of the most powerful forces in the world: it creates wars, it drives commerce, it fuels politics and it **IS** sports. It even infects the work of scientists and scholars. In the business world it’s called ambition, in the world of sports, competitiveness, in the world of politics, the duel for victory at the polls. The bottom line is that to win, to prevail, to wear the victor’s crown is EVERYTHING. The famous quote of the Green Bay Packers’ coach, Vince Lombardi, comes to mind: ***“Winning isn’t everything; it’s the ONLY thing.”*** After all, one of the worst things we can say about someone is that he is a “loser.”

Our Lord had something to say about this spirit of self-exaltation. He said: *“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve... .”* The narrow way—the Way of truth and life, the Way of Jesus—is not the way of conquest but the way of love; of putting others first.

The second kind of hunger, one with which we are all familiar, is the hunger for possessions. We love to own things—and we love to have it known that we own them. Early in the last century, a man by the name of Thorstein Veblen wrote a book entitled *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, in which he argued that one of the main motives behind the universal pursuit of wealth and property was the desire to impress other people through the display of possessions. To own the biggest house on the block. To drive a car that everyone admires. To wear expensive clothes or jewelry. Our hunger for possessions is distilled into its purest form in the love of money. Money confers upon us the ability to buy things, to own things, and, if we have enough of it, to control things; it’s a magic door into the land of self-glorification. The love of money can pose a serious threat to faith.

Luther once said that whoever or whatever you trust the most to keep you safe and make you happy is your god, and that that will be either God Himself, or it will be an idol. So it’s worth asking yourself: who or what do you trust the most to keep you safe and make you happy—is it God or is it money? Jesus made it plain that you can’t love them both.

Don't get me wrong—it's not that money is evil in and of itself: we all have to deal with money—it's what we work for, what we pay our bills with and what every modern economy is based upon.

It's not money that is evil, it's the love of it—which is to say the hunger for more and more of it—that spawns a multitude of evils. Like every other gift of God, money is to be used, not worshiped. When we make hunger for money or possessions the chief thing in our lives, we fall into the trap of imagining that we, and not God, are the owners of creation. We begin to imagine that our possessions will be ours forever, forgetting that, as Jesus said to the rich man who built more barns to store up all his grain: *"Fool! On this very night your soul will be required of you! Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"*

We are stewards, not owners of the things God has given us, and it is only by understanding this that we can use them as they were meant to be used and enjoy them as they were meant to be enjoyed.

Finally, there is hunger for the knowledge of evil. This may be the most insidious hunger of all, because the food it seeks comes in a multitude of disguises. We have all kinds of benign and pleasant names for this kind of knowledge: sometimes we call it art, sometimes we call it humor, sometimes we even call it education. Simply put, the knowledge of evil is any kind of knowledge that detracts from the glory of God or cheapens His creation. It can come in the form of sacrilegious paintings. It can come in the form of movies that ridicule or even demonize Christians (we've had a lot of those in the last fifty years). It can come from critics who distort the teachings of the church and misrepresent the beliefs of Christians in order to make them sound bigoted and hateful. It can come in the form of movies and television shows that are filled with vulgar language and sex. It can come in the form of a crude joke. It can come from a teacher who uses his authority to present a one-sided, unflattering view of Christianity.

One of the most obvious and tragic pieces of evidence for man's hunger for the knowledge of evil is the insatiable market that exists for violence and pornography. And between the internet and Hollywood, a vast array of products exist to supply this market.

Conquest, possessions, the knowledge of evil—these are idols which have plagued mankind ever since the fall. And the hunger we fallen creatures have for them can easily replace the healthy appetites God has programmed into our souls: a hunger for righteousness, a hunger for the forgiveness of our sins, a hunger for eternal life. This is the hunger that God spoke of to the Israelites through the prophet Isaiah when He said: *"All you who are thirsty—come to the waters! All you who have no money, come and buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance!"*

It is the same hunger that Jesus describes when he says: *"Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you... I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."*

When we make the Word and Sacraments of Jesus Christ a regular part of our spiritual diet, our hunger for Him and all that He offers us grows and grows until it becomes our major desire and our major delight. We hunger for the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness gentleness and self-control. We hunger for the kind of life Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden before the Fall when they lived in harmony with God and each other and creation. That hunger will one day be completely satisfied when we sit at table at the marriage feast of the Lamb in heaven.

But for now, we have a foretaste of that feast in the Lord's Supper, where all three of these hungers are satisfied: we receive the body and blood of Jesus, who is the righteousness of God; we receive the forgiveness of all our sins and are washed clean in God's sight; and we grow in faith and in love for our neighbor. And it is all absolutely free! The only thing you need to bring to the supper is a heart that hungers and thirsts for the forgiveness of sins.

So all of you who hunger and thirst for God's righteousness and for spiritual cleansing and for growth in faith and love for your neighbor: Come to the table!

Amen