

What Are You Hungry For?

My parents believed that you should always leave the table feeling that you could eat more, so that you never lost that feeling of want. Living in a culture of over indulgence we may have lost that feeling; instead we want to feel fully satisfied; we like to think that all of our needs can be met.

The global credit crisis of the past twelve months is indicative of such a culture that has wanted more than it can pay for. While what we acquire on credit may add to our living standard, does it add anything positive to our inner personal and spiritual well being?

I read recently that a “Partner Shopping Center” had opened in Dallas TX. A place where singles could go to choose a partner from among a selection of men and women. It was laid out with five floors, with increasing in positive attributes as you ascended up the floors. The only rules: Once you opened the door to any floor, you must choose someone on that floor, and if you went up a floor, you couldn’t go back down except to leave the place, never to return.

A couple of friends went to the place to find dates. On the first floor, the door had a sign saying, “These people have jobs and love kids.”

They read the sign and said, “Well, that’s better than not having jobs or not loving kids, but I wonder what’s farther up?” So up they went.

The second floor said, “These people have high-paying jobs, love kids and are extremely attractive.”

“Hmm,” they thought. “But I wonder what’s farther up?”

The third floor: “These people have high-paying jobs, are extremely good-looking, love kids and help with the housework.”

“Wow!” was the response. “Very tempting, BUT there’s more farther up!” And up they went.

Fourth floor: “These people have high-paying jobs, love kids, are extremely good-looking, help with the housework and have a strong romantic streak.”

“Oh, mercy! But just think what must be awaiting us farther on!” So up to the fifth floor they went.

The sign on that floor said, “This floor is empty and exists only to prove that some people are impossible to please.”

In our gospel reading (John 6:1-15) we find Jesus and the disciples attempting to hang out on a hilltop, only to find a large crowd, excited about the miracles they’ve seen, making their way toward the group. This was no small pack of fans. From all indications, it was a stadium full of people, lines of folks for as far as the eye could see, making their way to Jesus. Thousands, hungry for whatever it was that this celebrity rabbi would do next.

This could be both a logistical nightmare yet a not-to-miss opportunity to share the message. Jesus engaged in what would be his most magnificent miracle yet. Taking five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus said to the disciples, “Make the people sit down” (John 6:10). Taking the small simple meal, he gave thanks and then instructed the disciples to share it among the masses, inviting them to eat their fill. All were amazed.

When studying this story, it's tempting to see Jesus who's here to simply meet our needs and make our temporal troubles melt away. John tells us the people were so moved by the miracle that they wanted to throw a crown on Jesus and anoint him as their earthly king right there, on the spot! Not because of anything that Jesus taught them but because they were thinking, that with this guy in power, life will be one nonstop buffet of blessing!

Is that why we believe in God? When we're in need we believe that God will supply. We have a scripture to base that on – that God will supply all my needs according to God's riches in glory (Philippians 4:19). The word "supply" in more recent translations is replaced with "satisfy"; and the context in which this arises is Paul's prayer after the church has taken an offering to pay him. He asks God to satisfy their needs because they have sacrificed to meet his needs.

Indeed, I believe that this story of feeding the multitude is about Jesus teaching us the importance of sharing. It wasn't that there was no food, but that no one was willing to share with others the food that they had brought. So, while this may have been a physical miracle, it was also a miracle of the heart. Miracles happen when we're prepared to make a sacrifice – in this case a youth was willing to sacrifice his meal.

1. So, before we identify what we're hungry for, we might think for a moment what we're willing to sacrifice that the hunger might be met.

Living in Palm Beach, Florida was a most interesting experience. Karl & I had a comfortable life there – indeed the best that I've had in ministry; but I also had a keyhole glimpse into real opulence. It has been said that between US Thanksgiving and Easter/Passover there is more wealth per head population in Palm Beach than anywhere else in the world. There are miles of fabulous homes that are only lived in for four months of the year.

Karl & I would often drive along the coast road to our favorite breakfast place, and comment "if only we owned one these places we would live here forever." Well the reality was that we would never own one, and the people that did only did so when the weather was perfect.

Any prayers for God to supply us such a home would be wasted – one, we didn't need it, and two; they were not in God's inventory. The house that God provided happened to be in London, Ontario. (Be careful what you pray for.)

2. Jesus was also willing to sacrifice, that the message might be heard

We're not told what Jesus taught or spoke about. As a preacher I can imagine the frustration. Jesus first had to endure the chaos of the distribution, wait until everyone was satisfied, until he finally regained the attention of the people. Yet he felt it was more important to keep them there and put up with the commotion, than to let them wander off with food on their mind instead of his words.

This story inspired William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army. Booth, however, made the food distribution a key part of his ministry.

3. So, What are we hungry for?

These days, there are far more exciting things in life than sitting in church listening to a sermon. One hundred years ago, churches would be packed – and the service was probably less inspiring than ours, but the “togetherness” offered something that the people needed. It was a sense of community. It was also the assurance that they were in God’s will.

To a large extent, neither of these is on most people’s priority list. Yet they are still as important as they would’ve been a hundred years ago. What has changed – we have better communication, therefore we can find communities other than church. We live longer, and therefore being in God’s will is not so pressing an issue.

We are focused on growth – not because we just want more people – that could easily become a logistical nightmare, but because we believe that we are a relevant community, and that we are not ashamed of our faith in God – in fact God is relevant to our lives and lifestyles.

More than that, we have a message that has the edge – we are not condemned by God or the Bible. There’s a quotation that you may have heard – “The Bible has six admonitions against homosexuals, and 360 against heterosexuals. It’s not that God doesn’t love heterosexuals, they just need more supervision.”

So, if you’re hungry for a community, for friendship this could be a place to satisfy your hunger. If you’re hungry for an authentic relationship with God, for a stronger inner you, for greater spiritual awareness, this could be a place to satisfy your hunger. If you’re looking for self-worth, inner healing, a better understanding of love, this could be a place to satisfy your hunger. If, however, you’re looking for perfection, like paradise in Palm Beach, it’s an illusion.