

Sermon 3

Topic: Satisfying Hunger

Scripture Readings: Exodus 16: 1-21; Psalm 107:9

Introduction

Our bodies are amazing creations. They function with such intricate precision and possess such incredible detail. The various systems of the body perform their own discrete roles, yet all are integrated into one whole. No one system is isolated or operates by itself. Fundamental to all bodily functions however is the need for nourishment. All of the systems of our bodies rely on our ingestion of food to supply of nutrients the various parts with energy and nourishment for vitality, growth and proper functioning. Good health is directly related, therefore, to the ingestion of the daily required nutrients in the quantities that are sufficient for the body to function properly. When our bodies run out of this supply, we begin to crave for food and this desire must be satiated. This is hunger. The satiation of hunger occurs when we have had enough of the food and cravings recede. Hunger then, is an important function of the body. It serves as a signal that there is a need and that this need is to be satisfied. Satisfying hunger is therefore fundamental to sustaining life. It is one of the most basic yearnings of the human body. It is an important signal which, when ignored, can lead to all kinds of maladies.

Focus on the Text

Our text locates the people of God in the early stages of their journey from Egyptian bondage and as they moved towards the Land of Promise. They had seen the mighty works of their God in the great deliverance they enjoyed and which incidentally included food which would be later known as Passover. But now in the wilderness, new concerns had arisen as the people began to focus on their existential situation. Their growling bellies and parched tongues were now an ever-present threat and spelled doom. So, they complained. The nature of their complaints seems to belie the spectacular ways in which their God had delivered and provided for them. It appears that in their forgetfulness they had become consumed by ingratitude. This elicited God's response through an admonition from God's servants, Moses and Aaron to assure the people that God had not left them alone. The Lord then provided for them in such an astounding way that they were satisfied for forty years with a reliable, nutritious and safe supply of food.

God's example of provision is a glowing testimony of the care and compassion which characterized God's treatment of God's people. Their hunger was a trigger for boundless grace and provision. God patiently heard their cries and complaints and compassionately satisfied their hunger. As God's servants, Moses and Aaron administered and supervised not only the practical ministry of the provision of food, but the teaching/learning moment that had arisen. They helped the people to put

the experience into its proper context and to understand the meaning of this episode in their lives, both for the present and the future.

Exposition

Just like Moses and Aaron, we have been called to live in a world of need generally and hunger in particular, and as children of God we are called to serve and help to satisfy the requirements for food and drink around us. We are called to perceive the ways that God provides for human flourishing and provide clear and compassionate interventions that will build people's awareness and appreciation for God's provision for hunger and other necessities of life. In the furtherance of this calling, here are three proposals to help us to fulfil this calling to provide food for the hungry.

1. We must satisfy hunger to ensure physical vitality.

In their state of hunger, deprived of food and drink, the people realized that the environment in which they had found themselves was unfriendly and unsupportive of normal life. They could see no food and no recognizable source or supply. Their response to this trial was to reflect on the stability of food supply of the past, while they were in Egypt. Hunger often causes the kind of fatigue which can predispose someone to lose focus and a true appreciation of life. In other words, hunger can cause deprivation in some of those important bodily functions which may then result in the impairment of judgement and the loss of critical awareness. The old truism, "a hungry man is an angry man" is a poignant reminder of the inter-connectedness of our body systems and our dependence on the sustenance of food. While our bodies can go without food for long periods, the effect of this craving for food will nonetheless cause dramatic changes in both the physical and mental states of being. The people's complaint was surely a sign of a lack of faith. But it was also a signal of a deteriorating state of being. God's compassionate response literally gave them back their lives. They ate and were satisfied. The food they received was both starch and protein, two of the basic components of the five food groups of daily dietary requirement. What a relief it is when we have a good meal which "hits the spot" and satisfies our hunger. Moreso, how gratifying it is to see the look of satisfaction on the faces of our loved ones or strangers when they have been fed with a sumptuous, nutritious and satisfying meal. The ability to resume the demands of life is provided by a meal. Every human being is entitled to this basic right to food not only as foundational to Maslow's hierarchy of needs in order to ensure health and proper bodily functioning. We, the servants of God must work assiduously to ensure that the hunger that is around is satisfied physically and spiritually so that people can live and function with vitality. In the gospel according to Matthew, Jesus outlined that one of the bases on which he will judge the nations is their treatment of hunger and their response to people who are in need of food, clothing, shelter, etc. (Matt 25:31-46. We have a responsibility therefore to ensure that hungry people are fed and live in health by eating healthy and with life supporting food encompassing the basic ingredients of the five food groups.

2. Let us satisfy hunger to restore human dignity.

The hungry people were on the verge of starting a squabble and were tethering on the onset of a human tragedy. Their complaint was more than a remorseful expression of regret for their situation. It appears in some ways to have also been a challenge to order and decorum. Their words were tinged with rancour and threatened to stir up rebellion. This was a sign of an imminent descent into chaos and confusion. It was a challenge to authority. This is the kind of situation which frail human beings can fall into when they are unable to meet their basic physiological need for food.

We look around us and we can see the effects of hunger on the quality of life of many persons. The psychosocial dysfunctions which often occur are frightening and disconcerting. Physiological deprivation often leads to psychosocial deterioration, when the conduct of human beings descends and devolves to low levels, just because of a lack of a basic need such as food. The world is full of places where food shortages show the devastating effects of hunger on the humanity of those who suffer. Satisfying hunger averts people's descent into depravity and affirms their humanity. The provision of healthy food and the satisfying of hunger help to restore dignity and decency. As servants of God, who have been called to serve suffering humanity, we mimic the compassionate response of God to satisfy hunger and restore communion and connectedness between persons. It is our task to work in ways, driven by compassion, to eradicate hunger from our world. Just like the people of Israel, many of the people of the world are unable to "find food." This happens to people who are forced to move from place to place due to unforeseen and sometimes violent disruptions of their lives. It happens when the distribution channels are disrupted by forces and factors which either do not value, or ignore their humanity. It happens because of discrimination and stigmatization. We must ensure that their situation is alleviated by a compassionate response to satisfy hunger and restore the dignity of the dispossessed. When we work in this way, we help to affirm the fact that all persons are made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27) and require nutritious food to sustain the imprint of God.

We uphold this value of human life when we work to end hunger by providing nutritious food and in so doing, support or restore their dignity and personhood.

3. We must satisfy hunger to reaffirm social equity and community.

The miraculous provision of food - manna and quail - was astounding in several ways, not the least of which was the fact that it provided equal availability to all of the people of God. In a very basic and fundamental sense, the food was provided in a way that all persons had the same access to it. Everyone was able to have as much as they needed and had their full. There was no discrimination between classes and clans; there was no insistence on privilege or position. The text says "they gathered as much as each of them needed" (Ex. 16: 18).

The world we live in is a highly stratified and divided one. We discriminate and disenfranchise people based on standards and structures which destroy their sense of community and denigrate their humanity. We deny and delay rights and are derelict in our responsibilities to people in need, especially the poor. The text is a strong refutation of human structures of inequity and inequality. It tells us that each individual decided how much they needed and received. In other words, access and availability were the same for all; the amount which they took was entirely up to them. Indeed, it is no small wonder the Psalmist celebrates not only God's provision of food to satisfy hunger there is also the affirmation that God provide good things (Psalm 107:9). Structures of society very often alienate persons and often result in physical and spiritual hunger as a result of the disruption of the food supply. This is counterproductive and only serves to create an environment of malnourishment.

Too often food supply and provision are determined by prejudice and bias. Poor people and communities often get inferior left-overs and packaged foods without appropriate labels while the privileged and the powerful bask in wasteful excesses. We have a world full of inequalities which we must address by ensuring all five food groups are easily accessible to all classes, race, ethnicity and status of people. There is enough good and healthy food for the world to be adequately and properly fed. We must ensure that the structures which lead people to consume inadequate, unsafe and unhealthy food choices are eradicated and we satisfy hunger in ways that treat all persons as equals and value every human life. The church's attempt to satisfy the need for food through food banks and other means must meet the test of building community. Beneficiaries must also be treated with dignity and affirmed as equals.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion, we have been called to mimic the care and compassion of the God who has given us the ministry to care for others. Our "bowels of compassions" must be so attuned to the needs around us that we ceaselessly advocate and agitate for better food supply. Therefore, let us focus our attention today on satisfying hunger. Let us look for ways to satisfy hunger so that we retain the vitality and desire for healthy life. Let us satisfy the hunger that is around us to ensure that we affirm and retain a high value of human dignity. Finally, let us satisfy hunger and in so doing ensure equity for all.

Amen.