

Rev. Lynne Ogren Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
August 5, 2018 11th Sunday after Pentecost
Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15; John 6:24-35

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

This week in our *Taking Faith Home* page, the first Caring Conversation question asks us to tell about a time when we were truly hungry. Physical hunger is more of a reality in our country and in our community than we might think. It's the reason our congregation gives space and support to Blessings in a Backpack, and that so many of you bring food for the Community Cupboard regularly.

As a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a portion of our weekly offerings are sent on to the Montana Synod and from there to the churchwide expression of our denomination where our financial gifts are used to alleviate hunger in the United States and around the world. Did you know that ELCA World Hunger has Domestic Hunger Grants that support the work of congregations in the US to address hunger issues in their local communities?

Physical hunger is a reality for many people. And we heard the story last week of how Jesus and the disciples fed over 5,000 people on a hillside in Galilee beginning with just 5 loaves of bread and two fish. The crowd was drawn to Jesus by his healing miracles. And Jesus understood that before he could minister to their spiritual needs, he needed to minister to their physical needs. As part of Christ's church in this day and age, we are called to similar ministries where we live.

For many of us, though, physical hunger is a rare thing that we experience only when a meal is later than usual. I cannot remember a day when I did not have access to three full meals, plus snacks in between. But that doesn't mean I don't hunger for something.

There was a time in my life when I was hungering for something I could not name. I was given the opportunity to go to a discernment retreat. Most of the people were there to explore ministry possibilities, but the thing I came away with was that I was hungering for more music in my life. I had spent my high school and college years in choirs singing challenging music. I had played the piano for various groups and for worship, but at the time I wasn't doing any of those things and I hungered to make music beyond the hymns and liturgy in worship. Being able to name that hunger opened me up to create space for music-making in my life.

Maybe you know what it's like to hunger for a creative outlet like music or art. Some people hunger for attention or approval from others. We might hunger for a sense of purpose or community or belonging, especially when we are experiencing a life transition. With the number of demonstrations and marches we have seen in the past couple of years we also see a hunger for justice. And many of us hunger to learn, to engage in deep conversation about a topic that we are passionate about.

About twenty years ago a Christian musician named Plumb recorded a song called “God Shaped Hole”. The refrain says, “There’s a god shaped hole in all of us, and the restless soul is searching. There’s a god shaped hole in all of us, and it’s a void only he can fill.”

Jesus saw the God-shaped hole in the people who first followed him to the hillside and then rowed across the sea, seeking even more from him as we heard in our gospel passage today. They think they want more food for their bellies, but they have just been fed, and Jesus sees that they are really seeking something else, something more that will feed and sustain them in different ways.

We know what it’s like to think we are hungry for one thing when it’s really something else we need. We eat more food, drink more alcohol, or spend more money than we have, trying to fill a hunger in our lives. I believe the Israelites were really physically hungry when they complained about not having any food in the wilderness after God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. And God responded in a way that fed their bodies.

But they were also hungering for security. They were afraid, and even though they probably didn’t really have flesh-pots with all the meat they wanted in Egypt, they at least knew where their next meal was coming from and they had a routine they could count on. It was back-breaking, but predictable. In the wilderness, they faced the unknown.

God provided manna in the wilderness—enough for each day, or two days so they would take a Sabbath rest, and no more than they needed. And from that day until they crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land, they had manna to eat in the morning and meat to eat each evening. God provided both food for their bodies and the security that helped the people come to believe and trust in God in a new way.

This is Jesus’ answer to the crowd’s question, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” He said, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” Then he introduces himself as that very person—the One God sent into the world who knows our every hunger—our physical hunger, our emotional hunger, our spiritual and communal hungers—and he is the One who can and will feed them all.

When the Israelites first saw the manna in the wilderness they said in Hebrew, “*man hu*” or “what is it?” We have translated *man hu* to manna. What is the manna God sends to us today? What are you hungry for and how is God at work in your life, in the church, and in the world to feed those hungers? Sometimes it’s hard to identify when God is feeding us, but when we are putting our trust in things and systems other than God to feed our hungers, we know our faith needs to turn again to God’s love and promises for us.

And that God-shaped hole in all of us is filled and fed here each time we gather for worship. At this table, Jesus comes to us and feeds us with his own self. In the bread and the wine we trust that Christ is truly present and feeds perhaps our greatest hunger, our need for forgiveness, which heals our hearts and reunites us with God and with one another.

When we are fed here, we are then sent out to feed a hungry world, serving as the hands of Christ for others. The crowd first met Jesus as he fed their physical needs, and that is often

when people first meet Jesus today as we minister to the hungry and hurting. We know Jesus to be the Bread of Life, and it is our role as disciples of Jesus and children of God to address the hungers in the world around us so that others may come to know this full and abundant life that comes through faith.

Let us pray. Jesus, bread of life, feed us, body and soul. Jesus, bread from heaven, come and make us whole. Amen