

HUNGRY AND RESTLESS

Have you ever been hungry?

I mean, really hungry?

You desperately want something to eat.

You could almost kill for a hamburger, or pizza, or whatever!

Your hunger is such that you don't so much think about consuming food as you're being consumed by thoughts of food.

But sometimes we become hungry for things other than food.

There are times when we're hungry—I mean really hungry, desperately hungry—for something, and we might not even know exactly what we're hungry for.

All we know is, there's this deep, empty place inside our soul, and we're not sure how to fill it, or what to fill it with.

When we try to satisfy this emptiness, this hunger, with worldly things—things like money and cars and jewelry and fine clothes—it doesn't work.

Oh, we might be temporarily satisfied. For a brief time.

Maybe a few days. A week. A month or two.

But the emptiness always comes back. Our hunger returns.

I believe that when we feel an aching hunger deep within us that we can't seem to identify and we've tried to satisfy but haven't been able, it's a strong indication that such emptiness can only be filled with God.

Did you know there's such a thing as being hungry for God?

The church father Augustine wrote a famous, very brief prayer:

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

That “restlessness” Augustine talks about is the hunger I'm alluding to; a hunger for God that can't be satisfied with anything else other than God.

I came across a story about a young man who approached a very holy, spiritual man with this request:

“Show me how I can find God.”

“How great is this desire of yours?” the saintly man asked.

“More than anything in the world,” the young man replied.

The holy man led the young man to the shore of a lake and they waded into the water until it was up to their necks. Then the holy man put his hand on top of the young man’s head and pushed him down under the water.

The young man thrashed and struggled desperately, but the holy man didn’t release him until he almost drowned.

The young man surfaced, coughing and gasping and struggling to stand upright.

When they returned to the shore, the holy man asked, “My son, when you were under water, what did you desire more than anything in the world?”

“Air,” he replied without hesitation.

“When you desire to find God as much as you just then wanted air, your eyes will be opened and you will find him.”

That desire, that deep, restless hunger to find God, is in all of us. But we don’t always recognize it. We confuse our hunger for God with hunger for wealth or power or physical attraction to someone else. But those things can’t and won’t satisfy us.

When we’re hungry for food, we often ask ourselves, “What do I feel like having to eat?”

And if you’re like me, when you don’t eat what you crave, when you try to satisfy your hunger with something other than what your palate really yearns for, your craving doesn’t go away, even if you eat until your stomach is full.

In the same way, if we try to fill our hunger for God with anything other than God, it won’t satisfy us. All the pleasures and treasures in the world will still leave us hungry.

It’s that kind of deep hunger for God that Jesus came to satisfy.

“. . . unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”

Jesus wasn’t talking literally, of course. Our Lord wasn’t looking for cannibal-disciples; he was looking for disciples who were desperately hungry to find God and were seeking God’s Kingdom. Jesus said only he is able to satisfy such spiritual hunger, because it’s only through him that we can and will find God.

In a magazine I subscribe to called *The Christian Century*, a woman named Jan van Eys shared an incredible experience that she was fortunate to live through. This is what she wrote:

I was born in the Netherlands and lived through the German occupation during World War II. I was a teenager in 1944, when the war was reaching its end.

We were hopeful that after the D-Day invasion we would be liberated, but the Allies' progress stagnated at the Rhine River. They tried to cross at the Dutch town of Arnhem, but the attack failed. Morale in Holland sank to its lowest level.

During the Battle of Arnhem, the Dutch railway workers tried to help the Allied offensive by going on strike. The Germans retaliated by cutting off all food supplies to the occupied part of the Netherlands. It was the coldest winter on record in Western Europe, creating a double misery.

Widespread famine ensued. There was simply no food, and to compound the situation there was no transportation. Trains were not working. Buses, taxis and private cars could not be used because there was no gas. Bicycles had no tires. It was dangerous for men to venture out of the house. Fortunately, coke was still available, and we had an AGA cooker, so we could still cook what we could find.

My mother and father were resourceful and had money. They scrounged for food with some modest success. My father's firm had about a dozen employees, and our family served all of them at least one scant meal a day.

We cooked and ate tulip, narcissus and crocus bulbs—they taste like onions. Hyacinth bulbs were eaten in extreme moderation, because they are somewhat toxic. Sometimes there were potatoes available, and we managed to get a little wheat flour by bartering. Any bit of ground meat we had, usually rabbit, we extended with sawdust to make croquettes. Occasionally we got legumes and could make soup.

To this day, when I hear people say, "I'm hungry" or "I'm starving," I can't help thinking, "You don't know what you're talking about." During the occupation, no one got adequate calories. I was old enough that I didn't have serious developmental problems, but my younger brother never really recovered—his growth was stunted. My mother had edema—excess fluid buildup—from protein malnutrition. Both my sister and I lost significant weight. Of course, the survivors of German concentration camps were even worse off than we were.

The war dragged on. I was hungry, and I despaired that it would never end.

One day I was on the third floor of our house. I had not heard yet that the Americans had begun air-dropping care packages with food. A package landed in the gutter of our house, within reach of my dormer window.

It was the first real food our family had eaten for months.

That airdrop restored my hope for a future.

That intense, desperate hunger for physical food that Jan van Eys experienced in Holland during World War II is the level of spiritual hunger Jesus alluded to when he said, “. . . unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”

This spiritual hunger, to the point of starvation, for God can only be satisfied by Jesus. Nothing else will fill the void.

And that hunger for God will be in us and consume us until we do as he says and eat his body and drink his blood.

But what does that mean? How do we do that?

When we enter into an intimate relationship with Christ, through constant prayer and by immersing ourselves in Scripture . . .

. . . When we make Jesus our heavenly food by feasting on his words and teachings so they can nourish our souls and strengthen our faith . . .

. . . When we internalize Jesus by losing our lives in him, making his thoughts our thoughts, his work our work, and his resurrection to Eternal Life our resurrection to Eternal Life . . .

. . . Only then will that constant, unidentifiable emptiness in us be filled. . . .

. . . Only then will we have true life in us and live forever . . .

. . . Only then will our spiritual yearning finally be satisfied.

Because we were made for God, and our hearts will always be restless until they rest in him.

And Jesus was made for us, and our souls will continue to crave him until we feed on him.

Thanks be to God. Amen.