

February 29, 2004

Soul Hunger

Amos 8:11-12; John 6:48-51; 7:37-39

Preached by Rev. Dr. David C. Fisher

Six weeks and five days from now, many of us will gather in this room for our traditional Good Friday Service. It's a long and sober rehearing of the story of Jesus' crucifixion, focusing on Jesus' seven last words spoken from the cross. That's the destination of Lent — the cross.

Some folks come for the entire three hours. It's a Lenten discipline for them. Most people come for one or more parts of the service.

For two thousand years, Christians have gathered around the passion and death of Jesus Christ. Good Friday marks the end of Lent. Lent is seven weeks and six Sundays — a spiritual journey to the cross. The entire season is a discipline intended to develop our spiritual lives. Lent is a means to a larger end. The disciplines of Lent, climaxing in Jesus' death, prepare us for Easter. In fact, the passion of Jesus introduces his resurrection and the new life available in the Risen One.

Lent is a means to an end. Lent is about your spiritual life.

This year at Colonial Lent has a theme:

Hungering for God: A Lenten Journey.

Our theme is based on a biblical text, Psalm 63:1:

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you .

Each week we will focus on one of the hungers of the heart:

ÀSoul Hunger
ÀHungering for God
ÀHungering for Community
ÀHungering for Simplicity
**ÀHungering for Forgiveness/
Reconciliation**
ÀPassion/Palm Sunday

We are suggesting a resource for your use this Lent. It's a book the staff studied and recommends. It's available in the bookshop. The book is:

***Soul Feast* by Marjorie Thompson**

The entire Lenten Journey has a very specific purpose:

The growth and development of your spiritual life.

We think this is an appropriate theme for our time. There seems to be a deep spiritual hunger these days. It's a desire for spirituality. Or, you might say it in the language of the prophet Amos, there's a famine in the land.

The first paragraph of Marjorie Thompson's book speaks of this hunger,

There is a hunger abroad in our time, haunting lives and hearts. Like an empty stomach aching beneath the sleek coat of a seemingly well-fed creature, it reveals that something is missing from the diet of our rational, secular, and affluent culture. Both within and beyond traditional faith communities, a hunger for spiritual depth and integrity is gaining momentum.

The evidence of this hunger is all around us. Go to any bookstore and notice the spirituality section. Fifteen years ago such a section didn't exist. Today, dozens of books about spiritual are displayed in most book stores. Some are Christian. Some are not. People are hungry for soul food.

Or consider this: Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, is a run-away best seller. It's a Christian book written by a Christian pastor about living a purposeful Christian life. It's sold 13 million copies so far — a remarkable publishing phenomenon. In fact, according to the latest issue of *Christianity Today*, last year *The Purpose Driven Life* sold more copies than all the Harry Potter books, *The DaVinci Code* and *The South Beach Diet* combined. An editorial about the book thinks the reason is the famine in our land. People are tired of themselves and looking for meaning outside themselves. And, as I understand the book, Warren suggests that the only way to live a good life is to give your life to God.

This spiritual hunger, shared by Christians and non-Christians, cannot be fed by the entertainment values of our time with its celebrity culture and search for pleasure. Spiritual hunger goes deeper than success, money or possessions.

There's a supermarket of junk foods available in popular culture. All of them are attempts to feed the hungers of the soul. Sadly, most spirituality for sale these days is radically individualistic, forms of self-help usually served up without God.

Meanwhile, the hunger increases and popular culture invents new ways of entertaining us and pleasuring us. The great tragedy of the Super Bowl halftime show was not Janet Jackson's breast. Rather, it was the over-the-top commercialistic, consumerist, greed of the entire event. The world is starving, we're at war, our culture is divided and that extravaganza is the best this culture can come up with? Now, that's a tragedy.

Meanwhile, there's a famine in the land. It's a predictable famine. The prophet Amos declared that if the people of God forget God then God will send famine in the land. We'll look right and left for food, but there will be none.

The good news in the midst of this good news is very good news indeed. This spiritual hunger shared by all humans is wonderfully normal. To be a human is to be hungry. We're spiritual creatures who crave spiritual food. The only question is: What food will we consume?

Are you hungry?

Are you hungry for more in life? Hungry for a deeper life? Hungry for meaning in your life? Are you hungry for God?

If you are not hungry, if you are satisfied with your life and yourself the way things are, Lent can't help you. I can't help you.

If you want a short course in spirituality, a quick fix, instant Christian maturity, you've come to the wrong place. If you want the benefits of God without cost you've come to the wrong savior.

It's possible to be starving in the middle of church. Each week, each day, a feast is available for this congregation. Here we are surrounded by the Word of God, soul food indeed, face to face with the sacraments, in the presence of the living God. And some of us are blasé, others bored, some even resentful. And we starve.

Why is it we're more passionate about our work, success, politics, even hockey, than the living God? Why is it 100 people show up for a discussion of *The DaVinci Code* and two weeks earlier less than 25 come to a serious Bible study? Why do we love most things more than the Word of God? I don't say this to condemn you. But I am your teacher and your guide. And there's a famine in the land.

But, if you are tired of life the way it is, weary of religion as routine obligation, if you wonder where God is in your life or why there's not more God in your life, I have good news. Lent is for you.

If your life isn't going like you want and you need more life, more spirituality, more God. I have good news.

If your life is great, you're in control, a good person, but you want more. Good news. Lent is for you.

Maybe you've tried it all and it's not enough. Good news.

Best of all, if you are following Jesus, listening for his voice, loving God and God's world, but you want more, more God, more word of God, more love for God and neighbor. I have good news. Lent is for you.

Our two-year-old granddaughter is learning to talk. She's just now putting sentences together. Back in November she was just beginning to put words into sentences. Her mother went on a business trip for a week. Our son was both mom and dad for that week. He wasn't enough. Dagny missed her mommy. She didn't know how to say, I miss my mommy. Instead, our son told us, she kept saying, More mommy, more mommy, more mommy. We were on the phone with our son and Dagny figured out her daddy was talking to her grandmother whom she calls Nana. Dagny began to cry out in the background, More Nana, more Nana, more Nana.

The proper cry of Lent is, More God, more word of God, more love for God, more God. Are you hungry?

Hunger is very good. The question is what food we consume. The good news I bring you is in our Gospel Lessons in John 6 and 7. Jesus knows we are hungry and thirsty. And he knows where to find good food for the soul. Come to me, he cries, and I will give rest for your soul.

Jesus came from God to feed our hungry souls. He knows what the great St. Augustine taught centuries ago, O God, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.

Only God can feed the hungers of the human soul.

Jesus said, I am the bread of life. I am the living water. Come eat, drink and find rest for your soul. Are you thirsty? Come. Are you hungry? Come.

It's God's ancient cry to the lost creation. Isaiah put it powerfully,

Ho, everyone that thirsts, come to the waters. You who have no money, come, buy and eat. [Then the question of the ages.] Why spend money on that which cannot satisfy? (Isaiah 55:1-2)

Are you hungry? Do you want more spiritual life? It's not easy because consuming soul food runs contrary to human nature. It is, St. Paul declares, a matter of being transformed, being turned inside out, becoming someone new (Romans 12:2).

It's not easy, but it's simple. From the beginning God says, Put God number one in your life. It's the job of a lifetime. It's the question of your life. Will you make God number one? Will you cry out, More God, more God, more God?

Truth be told our spiritual hunger means we miss God. That what's makes us hungry. In the meantime, in our lives, down through the centuries God quietly says to us, I miss you. Come home. Will you?