

11TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 9, 2015

John 6:35, 41-51

"You'll Never be Hungry Again"

Pastor Saul Stensvaag

Most of us would say we know what it's like to be hungry. We all have those days when we're **so busy we end up working right through the lunch hour**. Or we're **traveling** and the schedule makes it **impossible to have regular mealtimes**.

But I wonder how many of us have ever experienced **true hunger** – the sort of **nagging, aching, debilitating** kind of hunger pangs that afflict large numbers of people living in the rest of the world.

We've all seen the heart-wrenching pictures, and been moved to give money to alleviate world hunger.

But today, I'm not going to preach about world hunger. Because, when Jesus declares that anyone who eats the bread of life will never be hungry, he **isn't talking about physical hunger**. Jesus is referring to a **different sort of hunger entirely**. And **the hunger Jesus is talking about** is one that YOU AND I KNOW ONLY TOO WELL.

This **deep, human hunger** can have many names. It's a **spiritual hunger**; a hunger for **inner peace, happiness, or meaning in life**.

Often, this hunger masquerades as a hunger for power, or money, or more and more possessions, but that's just because we somehow think that achieving these things will cure our hunger.

We live in a society where **advertisers relentlessly try to tap into this deep hunger**; offering thousands of false answers, which turn out to be **no solution at all**. You know what I mean. Everywhere we turn someone is promoting a product or program that will satisfy our longings.

When we startup our computer and open our e-mail inbox, we may find some rather bizarre offers. I've found emails promising a **sure-fire way to enlarge or reduce various body parts**, or to solve my **debt or weight problems**, or to help me find an **attractive and compatible partner**. As you can imagine, **these offers are easy to resist**, but **the deep, unnamed hunger** makes me **susceptible to other, more reasonable possibilities**.

Just open the Sunday Newspaper any week, and chances are a whole pile of ads will come tumbling out.

You look at the flyer from Best Buy, and suddenly, you realize that you really, really need the latest smart-phone, or maybe a higher definition TV screen. That would definitely make you happy!

Or one of those ads listing fishing boats or fish finders for sale, with all the latest whistles and bells.

I was going to show you one of those ads, or maybe the Best Buy flyer, but when I looked, for some reason, I couldn't find any. It seems that someone in our household must have hidden those away. I'm not sure why!

Anyway, **I think we're all programmed to want more stuff.**

It happens to all of us.

And of course, there's absolutely nothing wrong with buying things. It keeps our country's economy going, after all. And it helps keeps lots of people employed.

But sadly, **we so often get fooled into subconsciously believing that somehow, acquiring the right stuff** – whether it's the right job, the right friends or spouse, the right College degree, or the right toys – that somehow **if we could only get these things then we'd be happy, and the hunger would go away.**

But, **deep down, we know the truth, don't we?** No matter what we do, the **job is never great enough, the fame never lasting enough, the flat-screen TV never big enough** to still the voice of hunger for very long.

About six hours after eating a big lunch, I usually feel hungry again. How about you?

In the same way, not long after we acquire what we think will make us happy, we find that the spiritual hunger is still there. The bread of this world just **cannot satisfy our spiritual hunger.**

That **deep hunger**, that **feeling of longing** can ONLY BE SATISFIED BY GOD. This is not a new problem. God has been offering himself as the answer to our hunger for hundreds, even thousands of years.

In the Old Testament book of Isaiah, we hear God speak through the prophet: "*... everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! ... **Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?***"

GOD KNOWS OUR DEEPEST NEEDS. **God knows all about our hungry hearts.**

And he offers the **only thing that can satisfy that hunger and thirst.**

In today's Gospel, Jesus offers himself as the bread of life. And he tells us that whoever believes in him, whoever eats the bread which he offers, will **never be hungry!**

You know, **if I ever got an email that made such a claim I'd label it as spam** in the blink of an eye. This claim of Jesus' is **absolutely preposterous**. How can he promise that we'll never again be hungry?

It sounds just like all of the inflated promises we try to tune out whenever we watch TV, surf the internet, or read the newspaper.

"NEVER BE HUNGRY AGAIN! CALL NOW! OPERATORS ARE STANDING BY."

And if that's not crazy enough, Jesus goes on to say that whoever eats this bread – whoever receives his body – will live forever.

C.S. Lewis, author of the Narnia Chronicles, in his book, Mere Christianity says about this claim of Jesus:

"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would ...either be a lunatic – on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg – or he would be the devil of hell. ... Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else he's a madman or something worse. You can dismiss him as a fool or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God."

Either Jesus' claims are true, or else he's a madman not worth following. I'm guessing that you are all here this morning because for some reason, you have already decided that Jesus is not crazy, but is truly God's son.

And if that's the case, then **we have to take his claim seriously**.

Jesus says, *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry... whoever eats of this bread will live forever."*

Are these the **impossible claims of a madman**? No! They are the **ironclad absolutely reliable promises of the Son of God**.

BELIEVE HIM! HE CANNOT LIE.

Here at last is the **bread that can satisfy**, once and for all, **the deep spiritual hunger** that afflicts us all.

Here at last is **the bread that gives eternal life**. Jesus Christ is the **one and only answer to every question that's worth asking about the meaning of life**.

Whether you are new to this whole Christian thing, or whether you're an old pro at it, **all of us need to hear this message again and again.** We need to receive this bread of life. We have the chance to do so today as we take communion.

But unfortunately, because we've received the bread of communion hundreds of times in our lives, we often take it for granted, and act like it's no big deal.

And WE'RE STILL HUNGRY! The old song says it well, I think: *"I love to tell the story, for those who know it best, seem hungering and thirsting, to hear it like the rest."*

The **voices of this world can wear us down, and take their toll.** The hunger affects all of us; even Christians with strong faith. And so **we need to hear again the old, old story of Jesus and his love.**

As that same song puts it, this story *"satisfies my longing, as nothing else can do."*

And so I say to each of you: *"Come to the table again this morning."*

Come with a fresh and open heart. **Come with your deepest hunger.**

Come knowing that Jesus is **not some madman making ridiculous claims.** Come **believing he is the Son of God** who can **deliver what he offers.**

Come, **clinging to those promises:** 'whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever eats this bread will live forever.

Just **think how our lives might be changed** if we believed these words of Jesus. Just **think what life would be like if we were never hungry again.**

In the Gospel of John, the risen Christ appears to the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and cooks breakfast for them.

This morning, the risen Christ is here to serve breakfast to his modern-day disciples on the shores of Pebble Lake.

So come, my friends. Come and get it. AMEN