

“Everybody has a Hungry Heart” based on Exodus 16:1-4, 9-15 and John 6:24-35

Delivered on August 1, 2021 by Rev. John Nurnberger

New Jersey’s own Bruce Springsteen resumed his one-man show in late June. Like every other Broadway show, it was interrupted by the pandemic. I first heard Springsteen while working at a Salvation Army summer camp here in Hunterdon County. The person I shared living quarters with put the Born to Run album on the record player. That was 1974. Many albums and countless hit songs followed down through the years. One of those albums was The River. And one of the songs featured on that album was ‘Everybody’s Got a Hungry Heart.’ Yes, everybody’s got a hungry heart. Sometimes they just don’t recognize it.

Was it hungry stomachs or hungry hearts that drove the crowds to pursue Jesus? These were the same crowds who had been following Jesus, attracted by the miracles they had seen him do among the sick. He thought he had escaped them, so he could spend some time alone with his disciples. But the crowds doggedly pursued him. When he saw them coming, he wondered aloud to Philip, “Where can we buy bread enough to feed all these people?” Philip said it would take a fortune to buy enough bread for each person to get just one little piece. Then Andrew mentioned that he’d seen a little boy who had five barley loaves and two fish. But they were a drop in the bucket for such a huge crowd. Where Philip and Andrew saw scarcity, Jesus saw abundance. That meager supply of bread and fish, in Jesus’ hands, became a feast. Everyone, down to the last person, ate as much as they wanted. I imagine people thinking – or saying to one another – “wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could eat like this every day?” The next day those same people went looking for Jesus. But he was gone; their meal ticket was nowhere to be found. Why, they wondered, should we toil for money to buy food, when Jesus could snap his fingers and, voila, produce bread and fish. So, they went looking for Jesus, doggedly pursuing him until they found him.

Was it hungry stomachs or hungry hearts that drove the crowds to pursue Jesus? Jesus knew they had come looking for him because he had filled their stomachs. He told them as much. But Jesus recognized something they did not. They were driven by deeper hungers – hungers beneath their hunger – hungers of the heart. A woman named Debie Thomas writes weekly on the lectionary readings for an e-magazine, Journey with Jesus. She tells about helping her elderly parents move into their new home. As she worked to organize the kitchen, her father told her stories of his childhood she hadn’t heard before. Her parents came to this country from India. Her father described a time when he was five years old, when his village suffered a food shortage. The rains did not come, crops failed as result, and farming families, like his own, faced the prospect of starvation. Her father talked about what it felt like to go to bed hungry, and wake up facing the prospect of another day with little or no food. The experience was both physically and emotionally painful. All of a sudden, she was able to connect some dots about her father she had never connected before.

She remembered, growing up, how her father was obsessed about keeping everyone within his sphere of influence well-fed. Their refrigerator and freezer were jam-packed. Her father loved taking the family to all-you-can-eat buffets. He did not want anyone to leave the table

hungry. Her family never wanted for food. There wasn't a day they faced the prospect of going hungry. Yet her father was still haunted by his childhood experience. And by the fear of hunger. Her father never stopped hungering for the security of knowing there would always be food enough to eat every day. His hunger of the heart was insecurity, or the need for security.

We've probably all had this experience. You're watching something on TV, or sitting in front of a computer screen, and you get the feeling that you are hungry for something. You get up and go open the refrigerator, rummage through the shelves, open the storage drawers, looking for something, you know not what. Not finding what you want, you go root through cupboards or a pantry. Again, looking for something, you know no what. Nothing seems to satisfy you, so you return to what you were doing empty-handed. It wasn't a hunger of the stomach you were experiencing. It was a deeper hunger, a hunger of the heart. Restlessness. Boredom. Anxiety. Worry. Or something else.

Jesus invited the people who pursued him to probe their deeper hungers, the hungers beneath their hunger, the hungers of their hearts. Jesus did not deny or dismiss their physical hunger; that was real. But he wanted them to go deeper, look at what lay below their surface hunger, recognize and name their deeper hungers. Recall the story when Jesus was led into the wild by the Spirit to be tested. He fasted for a time, which left him extremely hungry. The Tempter took advantage of Jesus' hunger in the first of three tests. "Just say the word," the Tempter said to Jesus, "and you'll be able to turn these stones into bread." And do you remember what Jesus said in return? "It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes the life-giving word of God." Jesus is the Word made flesh, the true bread, the Bread of God that gives life to the world. Jesus wanted the people who doggedly pursued him to recognize – as he does us – that there are hungers only the bread of heaven can satisfy.

What are some of those hungers? A hunger for peace? Peace within ourselves and peace in the world. A hunger for security? A hunger to be free of worry and anxiety? A hunger for a sense of belonging, acceptance or love? A hunger of wholeness? It's one thing to name our hungers. It's another thing entirely to trust that 'the true bread from heaven, the Bread of Life', will satisfy them. Instead of looking to the Bread of Life to satisfy the hungers of our heart, we go looking for substitutes which, in the end, are unsatisfying. When Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty," he wasn't talking about physical hunger or thirst. No, he was talking about our deepest hungers, the hungers of the heart. And that the hungers of the heart are satisfied in a deep, abiding relationship with him.

Bruce Springsteen sang "Everybody's Got a Hungry Heart." He was spot on, rightly diagnosing the human condition. We all have hearts that hunger. But there is a song the church sings in response: "You satisfy the hungry heart with gift of finest wheat; come give to us, O saving Lord, the bread of life to eat..." It is in the One in whom we live and move and have our being that we find the end of all our striving, the rest from all our restlessness, the fulfillment of our deepest hungers.

Word Search Puzzle

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words in a straight line left to right or top to bottom



Words in the puzzle are printed in ***bold italics***.

John 6:24-35 (NRSV) So when the ***crowd*** saw that neither ***Jesus*** nor his ***disciples*** were there, they ***themselves*** got into the boats and went to ***Capernaum*** looking for Jesus. When they ***found*** him on the other ***side*** of the ***sea***, they said to him, "***Rabbi***, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your ***fill*** of the ***loaves***. Do not work for the food that ***perishes***, but for the ***food*** that ***endures*** for ***eternal*** life, which the ***Son*** of ***Man*** will ***give*** you. For it is on him that ***God*** the Father has ***set*** his ***seal***." Then they said to him, "What must we do to ***perform*** the works of ***God***?" Jesus ***answered*** them, "This is the work of ***God***, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "What ***sign*** are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What ***work*** are you performing? Our ***ancestors*** ate the ***manna*** in the ***wilderness***; as it is ***written***, 'He gave them ***bread*** from heaven to ***eat***.'" Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not ***Moses*** who ***gave*** you the bread from heaven, but it is my ***Father*** who gives you the ***true*** bread from heaven. For the bread of ***God*** is that which comes down from ***heaven*** and gives ***life*** to the ***world***." They said to him, "***Sir***, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be ***hungry***, and whoever believes in me will never be ***thirsty***."