

# Hungry

## Matthew 14:13-21

### INTRODUCTION

Once there was a man who was struggling. He couldn't sleep at night, and he couldn't focus on anything during the day. His friend was deeply concerned for him and recommended that he see a psychiatrist, which he willingly did.

- The day after his appointment his friend checked in to see how things were going.
- "Great!" the man answered. "The psychologist told me the only way to achieve the true inner peace I lacked was to finish whatever I start. So far today, I have finished two bags of peanut M&Ms and an entire chocolate cake. I feel better already."

We like to eat, don't we? Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are a normal part of our day. We orient our days around eating food. Unless we were doing some kind of intentional fasting, most of us wouldn't think of going without food for a week or even a day, would we? Food is necessary for physical life. Without it, we become weakened and we would eventually become ill.

Recently I was struck by how often the Bible talks about food.

- God provided manna in the wilderness.
- The Promised Land was described as a place overflowing with milk and honey.
- Jesus gave us the Last Supper, and He did it while He was eating the Passover Meal ... at which He broke bread and proclaimed that it was His Body.
- Jesus ate with sinners.
- He told parables about fig trees and wheat fields and great banquet feasts.
- The Gospel lesson is the feeding of the 5,000.

If you read your Bible, you are likely to get hungry!

Maybe that's the goal. Let me show you what I mean.

As you know by now, this summer my sermons have been focusing on God's plan for His church. Pentecost is over. Jesus is in heaven. And the work of the kingdom has been placed into the hands of the church. That's us!

- So if kingdom work is our responsibility, we need to know what we are doing.

To help us learn that, I have taken one word out of the lectionary texts and used it to summarize that morning's teaching about the purpose of the church. So far I have used the words CALLED, SENT, ALIVE, ADOPTED, and CONQUERORS.

- Today's word is **suggested** by the text, not actually found in it. Here's the text:

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." (Matthew 14:15)

My word for today is:

HUNGRY

In order to fulfill the mission of Christ, the church needs to be HUNGRY. Let me make three observations:

### **#1: CHRIST IS FILLED WITH COMPASSION WHEN HIS CHURCH IS HUNGRY**

Look at verse 14:

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them ...  
(Matthew 14:14)

That verse is better translated “moved with compassion.” The Greek word there is:

viscera (visceral)

... from which we get our English word “visceral.” Visceral means to “have your inner being” stirred. It is a stronger word than “sympathy.”

- Sympathy means to “feel” something
- Viscera means that you feel it so deeply something happens inside and you find yourself compelled to do something about it.
- The “need to do something” far surpasses the mere “feeling.”

The Bible uses this word several times to describe the ministry of Jesus. In Matthew 20 he gives sight to blind men. In Mark 1 He heals a leper. In Luke 7 He resurrects the only son of a grieving widow.

- And in today's text, He feeds the hungry. He will repeat the miracle two chapters later – all because He is moved with compassion (viscera).

A few weeks ago, when I was preaching on the word “SENT” I shared the story of Kristie Ward of Naomi's Heart Mission. If you remember that story, she had been on a mission trip and when she came home, she felt compelled to do something. In her own words:

It became such a burning desire ... God led us to sell our house and possessions, quit our jobs and raise support. ([www.naomisheartmission.org](http://www.naomisheartmission.org))

That's viscera. It's that gut level, burning desire that Jesus felt when He saw the hungry people.

- Or let me put it this way: When people who are truly seeking after Jesus are hungry, Jesus is always moved to compassion. In fact, Jesus tells us that His blessing is poured out on those who:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.  
(Matthew 5:6)

Not physically hungry, but spiritually hungry. The church is supposed to be composed of hungry people – people who hunger for more of God. Blessed are they!

Part of what makes this truth so powerful for me is the context. In the first 12 verses of this chapter, Jesus' cousin and good friend John the Baptist was beheaded because he had the audacity to call "sin" a sin. When today's text starts (verse 13), Jesus is grieving.

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. (Matthew 14:13)

He wanted to get away in His grief. But the hungry people came. They wanted more of Jesus. More teaching. More miracles. More Him.

- No matter what else may be happening, when people are hungry for what Jesus has to offer, He is moved with compassion.

We are to be all the words I have used to describe the church in this sermon series. We are called, sent, alive, adopted, conquerors – but behind them all is the need to be hungry for God.

## **#2: CHRIST FEEDS US DESPITE OUR LIMITED RESOURCES**

Verse 17:

"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. (Matthew 14:17)

I love this part of the story. There were 5,000 men plus women and children – maybe 20,000 in all. But only one little boy packed his lunch.

- Can't you picture it? This little boy burst into his home and begged his mother to go with the crowd to hear Jesus. "Can I go? Please can I go?"
- "All right," his mom. "But let me pack you a snack in case you get hungry."
- "But Mom, I don't have time to wait. The crowd is leaving right now."
- "No son of mine is going to go off without a lunch. I was at Kroger this morning and picked up these Lunchables. This one has two little fish and five little chunks of bread. Take it and go. And be home before dark."

Twenty thousand people out in the middle of nowhere, and all they have is little boy's Lunchable. That's not much to work with, is it?

- But it was enough for Jesus!
- In fact, it was more than enough because He had so much leftover!

They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. (Matthew 14:20)

There is an old hymn I remember singing in my home church. It had a line that has been echoing in my head all week:

Little is much when God is in it. (author: Kittie Suffield)

As I pondered this point in the message, I realized there are really two groups following Jesus at this point of the story.

- There are the 20,000 men, women and children who had raced from the surrounding villages when they heard that Jesus was in the vicinity.
- And there are the 12 disciples, who have been following Jesus for a couple of years.

I found myself asking:

Which group is the picture of the church? The 20,000 or the 12?

And I realized the answer is “Both.”

- Biblically speaking, the church is composed of anyone who is hungering for Jesus.
- Some of us have been hungering for a while. Others have only been hungering for a few months or weeks.

The surprising thing is that neither group knew that “little is much when God is in it.”

- You can forgive the 20,000 for not knowing. They had no experience with Jesus.
- But those 12 – those people who had been walking in faith for a number of years – who had seen water turned to wine – didn’t see it either.
  - Think about it. When they saw limited resources, their solution was to:

Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food. (Matthew 14:15)

Both groups need to remember that God provides. His resources are unlimited. His church – that is, the people who hunger after Him – will never lack the resources they need.

One writer says this:

Jesus still has compassion on the hungry multitudes, and He still says to His church: “Give them something to eat.” How easy it is for us to send people away, to make excuses, to plead a lack of resources. Jesus asks that we give Him all that we have and let Him use it as He sees fit. A hungry world is feeding on empty substitutes while we deprive them of the Bread of Life. When we give Christ what we have, we never lose. We always end up with more blessing than when we started.

### **#3: CHRIST CALLS US TO COME**

I want to show you a sequence of sentences in this text:

<sup>17</sup> "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. <sup>18</sup> "Bring them here to me," he said. <sup>19</sup> And he directed the people to sit down on the grass.

I am almost 100% sure that Jesus wanted the bread and fish brought to him. But you could read that sequence as Jesus asking that the people be brought. Notice that the loaves and fish are already "here."

I had never thought about that possibility until I paired these verses with Isaiah 55, our Old Testament reading:

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good... (Isaiah 55:1-2)

In Isaiah there is a clear invitation to "come." If you are hungry, if you are thirsty, then come.

In Christ, you will find what you are looking for. You will be fed. But you need to come.

## **APPLICATION**

Tommy Tenney is a pastor and author best known for his book "God Chasers." In another of his books he talked about a time that God spoke to him and said: "Your favorite worship services and My favorite services are not the same. You leave your services full and satisfied, but when you leave, I'm still hungry."

He writes: "I wish I knew then what I have discerned since – that God will leave our meetings full and satisfied only when we begin to leave them feeling hungrier for Him than when we first came."

One of the often used slogans of IHOP restaurants is "Come hungry. Leave happy." If Tommy Tenney is right, the slogan for the church should be:

Come hungry. Leave hungrier.

As followers of Jesus, we can never get too much of God. There should always be a hunger for more.

So who are we? We are HUNGRY. We are the Church.

Amen