

Diocesan Sermon - 2nd August 2026
The Rev'd Jeni Bedding

Hunger and thirst

Isaiah 55:1-5; Psalm 145:8-9,14-21; Romans 9:1-16; Matthew 14:13-21

Father God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable to you. O Lord, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen.

What do you hunger and thirst for? Do you long for the newest gadget, an easier way of life, better health, more food on the table, or do you hunger after God and his righteousness? Where do your priorities lay? What satisfies your deep longings? Our gospel reading follows on from last week's search for the 'treasure in the field' and 'the pearl of great price' as we contemplate what it means to experience God's kingdom.

Isaiah speaks of God's invitation to come to him for what satisfies, an everlasting relationship with him, the Holy One of Israel. There are no conditions, God is generous to those who accept His invitation and when we accept, and are blessed, people will see and will be drawn to God.

As our psalmist describes God's generosity, especially to those overlooked, God sees all. He hears the cries of the needy, see those who stumble; his hand is open wide to offer all the needs of those who call upon Him. There is justice for those who accept and those who reject his invitation.

In our Romans reading, Paul reminds us that it is God who calls us, and it is his will that prevails; His grace and mercy are not offered as a result of human effort or desire, but on God's will alone. Being a biological descendant of Abraham does not necessarily make you a child of God. 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'

Paul's statement that he would cut himself off from Christ if it meant he could guarantee their adoption as God's children illustrates the hunger and desire we should have for the salvation of others.

We see this concept repeated in our gospel reading in reference to John the Baptist. John's decision to preach repentance to every man, woman, and child, led to his arrest and then his beheading. His death brought great sadness to many, not least being his cousin Jesus, and his disciples. In our gospel reading

Jesus has chosen to retreat to a quiet place. He and his disciples are grieving, and Jesus knows that they are exhausted and in need of rest for their human bodies. They get into a boat on the Sea of Galilee, or Sea of Tiberias, and withdraw to a solitary place.

But the crowds who had not tired of the miracles and Jesus' teachings were hungry for more and they tirelessly followed the boat and met up with it as it pulled ashore on the other side.

Jesus, although exhausted, looked at them and had compassion; he saw them as sheep without a shepherd. In his exhaustive, grieving state he did not preach, but instead moved among the people, with healing hands curing them of their illnesses and infirmities.

In this image we glimpse the kingdom of God. When you are hurting do you gravitate to someone who appears to have it all together, or to someone who appears to be experiencing the same loss or pain as you? Jesus came to earth to experience and live a human life; our weaknesses, griefs, pain, loneliness, sorrow. He understands our hunger and thirst, our deepest desires, our longing after righteousness. Jesus moved among the crowd demonstrating his understanding and compassion and offering physical and spiritual healing to others and perhaps experiencing it himself as a result. He knew what God's purpose was for his life, and despite his human body failings, he pushed on in God's strength; it was a powerful example for the disciples and for us.

As nightfall came, Jesus' disciples still exhausted by grief and the long day, tried to persuade Jesus to send the crowds away before it got dark, so they could get something to eat and find lodging for the night, because they were in a desolate place. Jesus says to the disciples, "You feed them!" What must they have been thinking? There is over five thousand men, let alone women and children, how could they even start to contemplate to feed them.

Upon the discovery of five small barley loaves and a few fish, Jesus enacts the scene we find described in all four gospels, 'the feeding of the five thousand'. A pivotal demonstration of God's great unconditional love for all who hunger and thirst after Him. It is an example of God's power and glory, and his unconditional love for every one of those people. Jesus broke the loaves into pieces, blessed it, raising it heavenward, trusting entirely in the power of God, and then gave it to the disciples to distribute.

In this demonstration we remember God's provision of manna to the Israelites in response to their hunger. God blessed them every morning with an omer, which is equivalent to a kilogram, for each person. He described it as raining down from heaven. And all ate and were filled. God's provision extended to a double portion before the Sabbath so the Israelites could observe it.

Before the meal was distributed the people were instructed to be seated, to prepare for receiving. They had just witnessed and/ or experienced Jesus' compassion and healing, and therefore their hearts would have been prepared. They were not asked if they believed, there were no conditions placed upon them, they were just asked to be seated; it was an open table.

This is what we experience every time we come before the Lord's table. We should come to worship, hungry and thirsty for God, with the desire to be refilled with his Holy Spirit. Our liturgy is a means to prepare our hearts to receive: praise and worship; confession; hearing and expounding God's word. Then we receive and offer our thanksgiving.

All ate and were filled and the remainder of the broken pieces that had been distributed were collected. This action points to Jesus' offering at the Last Supper in the upper room where he blessed and broke the bread before it was distributed to the disciples, and his sacrifice for us as the 'bread of heaven'. The pieces remaining illustrates the ongoing blessing that a relationship with Jesus Christ offers those who hunger and thirst for it.

The last part of the gospel echoes our Isaiah and Psalm readings, the invitation is for all, it extends to the women and children, the needy, the forgotten and overlooked, all those who hunger and thirst for God.

This is the breaking through of God's kingdom, the compassion of God's ongoing ministry that we are invited to continue. When we hunger and thirst for God's righteousness, and accept His invitation, God takes our small amount, our paltry offering, and multiplies it so that all are blessed.

In the name of the father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.