

# Hungry Heart

August 4, 2024

## Everybody's Got a Hungry Heart

The very first worship service in the UCC that I led was on Christmas Eve. On the Fourth Sunday of Advent, I had wrapped up my ministry at the Catholic parish I was serving as a full-time lay person on staff, and then on Christmas Eve I was on staff at First Congregational UCC in Oconomowoc. The senior pastor at Oconomowoc was a great mentor. As we planned the service, he suggested that I sit with him in the chancel, read the Gospel, and co-preside at Communion, all things women aren't allowed to do in the faith community I was coming from. I gladly accepted his invitation, and from the moment we took our seats, I had this amazing sensory overload. It wasn't the music, although that was lovely. It wasn't the soft glow of the candlelight and the snow that we could see through the clear glass windows.

You know what overwhelmed me? I could smell the bread! Communion smelled like bread, like actually something that could nourish and satisfy our bodies, not just serve as a symbol of a meal 2,000 years ago. I've often said that, if I ever write an autobiography, the chapter title of that time in my life will be, "And I Could Smell the Bread."

How many of you are hungry? Physically hungry? Not just a little peckish, but in actual NEED of food? I can't be sure, but I'm going to hazard a guess that it's not too many. But how many of you are spiritually hungry? Emotionally? Intellectually? Even though we have food and basic necessities, like the disciples, we come to Jesus because somehow, we're still hungry.

Have you ever been to a fancy restaurant that served an amuse bouche? An amuse bouche is a tiny, one bite course that is sometimes served at the beginning of a meal. As the name implies, its purpose is to amuse your mouth, and it can serve to stimulate diners' hunger. As we reflect on Jesus as the Bread of Life, I wonder if it might be interesting to look at our celebration of Communion as an amuse bouche, something to stimulate our taste buds and prepare us for what's to come.

To quote that renowned theologian Bruce Springsteen:

Everybody needs a place to rest. Everybody wants to have a home. Don't make no difference what nobody says. Ain't nobody want to be alone. Everybody's got a hungry heart.

Or that lesser-known theologian Augustine, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."

Just like the disciples who sought out Jesus in the wilderness, we all have a hunger. The disciples, just like us, were yearning for more – connection, love, and joy – and undoubtedly some of them, just like some of us, were yearning for more fame, acceptance, power, recognition. These hungers are pretty common once people's basic needs are met. We all also know that, all too often, we attempt to fulfill our spiritual hungers with things that don't satisfy. The excessive accumulation of things, addiction, even our attempts at physical safety and security are all twisted and contorted manifestations of our spiritual longings. Greed, war, fame,

and power are only a few of the misguided ways that we try to fulfill the deepest desires of human nature.

The French mathematician Blaise Pascal compared our deepest desires to an infinite abyss that must be filled. He said, “this infinite abyss can only be filled with an infinite and immutable object – by God.” Pascal, Augustine, Springsteen, are all riffing on the Bread of Life.

Part of what we start to read in today’s Gospel is Jesus telling us that not only does he have the answer, his way of being is the answer. In telling the people with hungry hearts that he is the bread of life, he is saying miracles aren’t why I’m here. I’m about transforming the world, and the way that’s going to happen is if you absorb me into your very being, if you become me, if you come to understand that your relationship to me is as if I am bread and you are what you eat. Absorb me into your cells, so that I am what energizes you, what animates you, what comes out of you, so that my priorities are your priorities, so that my ways are your ways, my values are your values, my morals are your morals.

And what constitutes the bread of life? What are the ingredients of this Jesus-Bread? Compassion and mercy and healing and hope. The bread of life is redemption, which is really just a fancy theological word for homecoming. It’s inclusion.

I recently came across this quote from Rev. Michael Coffey, a Lutheran pastor in Austin, Texas. He’s referring to Jesus’ appearance to the disciples after the resurrection, but it applies here, too:

Jesus is hungry: hungry to share a meal and celebrate life; hungry to gather again with his friends; hungry for them to trust the life-giving power of God; hungry for them to become a new community of faithful, courageous living; hungry for them to break bread together and with strangers everywhere until strangers are strange no more. The resurrected Jesus is a hungry Jesus. He comes to feed us with his bread and wine, his street-corner fish tacos with chipotle sauce, his living, loving presence. And then, he feeds us with his hunger, until we are hungry for the same things: companionship, meals shared in community, a gathering of strangers and friends where everyone is fed.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus is telling us that it is being transformed into his being, feeding on his ways and teachings until they’re what make up who we are, that is going to satiate our souls. So when you notice hunger in your spirit, when your heart and mind become hangry, gnaw on some compassion. Make yourself a feast of mercy. Marinate yourself in inclusion and justice. Allow joy to be the yeast that rises in you. And, when you do, you’ll never be hungry again.

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