

During this season we're pondering the Beatitudes in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

We've already considered three of them: "Blessed are the poor in spirit,"
"Blessed are the who mourn,"
"Blessed are the meek..."

Now comes Number Four:

**"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they shall be filled."**

I hope you had your breakfast this morning, because I intend to talk about being HUNGRY ... to talk about FOOD.

It's a subject we could have fun with, you know.

Sam Levenson said:

"When I was a kid, my mother always offered me two choices at supper...
take it or leave it!"

Miss Piggy of Muppet fame advised: "Never eat more than you can lift."

George Burns said as he approached age 100,

"I want nothing to do with natural foods. At my age I need all the preservatives
I can get!"

But when you get right down to it, food is not really a joking matter!

FOOD is ESSENTIAL...

every living creature needs it, and many don't have nearly enough...

HUNGER is one of the great, enduring social issues before us.

I'm not talking about the pangs you get watching Red Lobster commercials.

I'm not talking about the days that supper may be an hour late and you say

"I'm hungry enough to eat a horse..."

I'm speaking of the grinding, gut-wrenching, soul-shrinking hunger that
comes to the poor who haven't had a decent meal in weeks, and don't
know where the next one's coming from.

There is plenty of that kind of hunger right here in America.

Last Sunday I heard that 63% of the kids at Mt Pleasant School (half a mile from my own house!) are living below the poverty level, and many come to school hungry every day.

There are the invisible people who live under bridges and out in the woods near Estacada with gaunt bodies and hollow eyes. Hungry people.

Yet as bad as it is here, it is even worse in third-world countries.

You have seen the pictures of the people mobbing relief trucks to get a bag of rice... or the pathetic images of children with shriveled bodies in the Sudan. Those are pictures that haunt us.

So it is that we Christians have busied ourselves working at food banks here in OC, making meals for the Transition House in Portland, and supporting Backpack Buddies, and Bread for the World and Loaves and Fishes...

In this we follow the lead of Jesus. We remember how He fed the multitudes with those original loaves and fishes.

But this morning, I want you to hear what He said AFTERWARD. For after the people that day had eaten their fill and were clear-headed again, Jesus spoke to them of another kind of hunger, another kind of food:

“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life”
(John 6:27)

All food comes from God, of course!

But there is a FOOD God provides not merely that we may EXIST day to day, but that we may live fully, deeply, as He intended.

It is food for the “more abundant life” He offers.

It is the food in the middle of this fourth beatitude: **“Blessed are those,”** He said, **“who hunger and thirst for RIGHTEOUSNESS.”**

That food is RIGHTEOUSNESS. But what is RIGHTEOUSNESS?

RIGHTEOUSNESS is a word used in both OT and NT.

When we hear this word, we may think of it as a fancy, churchy sort of word for being a very good person.

But there's more to it. It is, in fact, a "relationship" word.

It would help to take the first five letters – R-I-G-H-T. That small word is at the beginning of the big word and helps define it.

Righteousness means, first, being in a rightly-ordered relationship with God. It means that God is in His rightful place in our lives. In the center!

Then, as a result, it means being in a RIGHT relationship with other people. As he has loved US, so now we love and respect THEM.

So important is this set of RIGHT relationships that Jesus says
"Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness"

Seek it FIRST.

This is the food we need the most, even more than the bread we eat and the water we drink.

That's the "food" that fueled Jesus in His ministry.

"My food," He said, **"is to do the will of Him who sent me"** (John 4:32)

He had a RIGHTEOUSNESS mission.

That is to say, the job He came to do was to REPAIR THE RELATIONSHIPS.

On the cross He placed Himself between heaven and earth to repair the connection, to make us RIGHT with God and the neighbor.

Look at the cross for a moment.

It is made of two intersecting lines – one vertical, one horizontal.

The VERTICAL LINE - God and people re-connected.

The HORIZONTAL LINE – People reconciled to each other

Those lines meet at the middle, in the body of Jesus fastened there.

His food was to make us RIGHTEOUS – Right with God and each other.

Now His food must become OUR food.

"Blessed are those who HUNGER... for RIGHTEOUSNESS."

But do we? Do we HUNGER for it?

I asked the children earlier if they were hungry.

Now I ask YOU.

I know some of you might have skipped breakfast, or that maybe you are on a diet and your stomach is growling.

It could be that while I'm talking, your mind is imagining a vision of crisp bacon beside a couple of sunny eggs, or a plate of pancakes with rich, warm maple syrup, with a cup of cocoa or a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice. Mmmm!

You know what it means to be hungry for FOOD.

But what ELSE do you hunger for just now?

People say, of course, that they are hungry for other things besides food! Like being champs in some sport.

I heard an athlete say he and his teammates were so hungry for a championship they "could taste it."

Coaches say they want players like that. "He's hungry" is a compliment. That means motivated! Willing to do what it takes!

Would someone say that of you? That you're HUNGRY for something?

Though they may not say so, people are starved for other more significant things than sports trophies.

Appreciation. Friendship. A listening ear. Just plain LOVE!

Mother Teresa made a visit to the United States years ago. On her visit, she observed:

"In India, people are dying from physical starvation..

In America, people are dying from emotional starvation."

A hunger is an EMPTY SPACE in the heart or the emotions.

Too often we try to fill up the empty places in us in the wrong way.

A child is starved for attention.

He isn't getting it from his parents, so he begins to act out – he screams, pouts, throws toys, ANYTHING to get attention.

A middle-aged man has lost his wife. He's depressed, hungry for a sense of peace.
He drinks each night to medicate a grieving heart, and for a while he finds
oblivion and peace in the bottle.

A teenaged boy joins a gang. Why? Because, say many experts, he is HUNGRY
for a sense of family that's missing at home.

Temper tantrums. Drinking too much. Joining a gang.
Troubling, yes, and understandable. Those folks are HUNGRY!
But they're not going to find satisfaction that way, in part because they do not realize
what they are hungry for...

One writer said that inside every person is a "God-shaped vacuum – something
only God can fill because he was the one who made us."

In this beatitude, Jesus is promising that God has something that will satisfy, if only we
can name that hunger and seek the right food.

Can you name it? Are you hungry for it?

"Blessed are those who HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

RIGHTEOUSNESS. That's the food God offers.

He offers it free. And he offers it right here. He offers it anywhere that
the word of Jesus and the grace of Jesus is offered.

I like to tell my confirmation students that coming to church is like going to
someone's house for dinner.

You knock on the door, wipe your feet, and go in.

You are ushered to the table, and a rich banquet is laid out for you.

There is dinner – delicious! Then there comes dessert.

We eat and drink. It satisfies. We thank our host and go home.

Isn't that the very thing we do here?

We come in, HUNGRY to be right with God and with others again.

So we come to His house.

We wipe our feet in the confession of sins.

We are seated at the table and feed on God's Word, read and preached.

Many Sundays there is dessert too – the sacrament to eat and drink.

We thank God, satisfied, made RIGHT with Him.
We go out, determined to set things RIGHT with our spouse, our children,
our neighbor.

At least this is what God intends. Do we?

I repeat my question: ARE YOU HUNGRY?

I am told that one of the final symptoms of those who are starving to death is that they finally lose their appetite. Their bodies begin to shut down, and the chemical reactions that signaled hunger to them no longer work.

Death is near.

It happens to people spiritually. They lose their appetite for God's Word, for the sacrament, for church in general. They give up on relationships that are difficult. They stop trying...

Has it happened, is it happening to you?

If it is, Martin Luther made this suggestion in the Large Catechism:

**“What shall I do if I do not experience hunger ... for this sacrament?
I can give you no better counsel than to tell you to pinch yourselves and see
if you are still flesh and blood. If you find that you are, then believe the
Scripture, ‘I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing’
Go because of your need...”**

Maybe I am like the nurse who comes to the bedside of the hospital patient who has no appetite, and says,

“Here, I know you are not hungry just now, but EAT!
You need the nourishment, even if you do not desire it.
When you get better, your appetite will come back too.”

God has prepared a feast for us.

All that we need. The richest of food and drink...at no cost at all.
The promise in Christ to make things Right again with Him,
and with each other.

“He calls me to His banqueting table – his banner over me is love.”

Are you hungry? I hope so, for there is plenty to eat, and He promises you'll be satisfied!