

“We are so hungry!”
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No matter how old we are, or what age we live in, there is always something we are starving for.

Babies, of course, need food and sleep and loving. Kids who are exploring the world (both natural and commercial!) often don’t know what they are really hungry for. Adolescents desperately need to belong. Young adults need work to focus on and roots to establish. Middle agers need a mix of stability and novelty. Seniors need security. And everybody needs love!

There is so much we are all hungry for in this world and there are so many challenges, divisions, and tragedies that can overwhelm us: natural calamities like heat waves, eruptions, fires, floods; personal heartbreak like illness, divorce, loss of home, job or loved one; and human battles over finances, politics, gun control, religious beliefs, healthcare.

It’s overwhelming! And we are starved for peace, for understanding and equality, for belonging. We are so hungry for a world where good leadership can unite us and help us focus on positivity.

Things were no different in biblical times. For centuries people fought over territory and resources. Whoever was in power proclaimed what was good, and established laws to support their platforms; and poor people always lost. Religion was no help. Gods were territorial and favored their own followers. Religious authorities and hierarchies were formed, and their laws created new divisions—both within and beyond their faith.

In New Testament times, the Romans were the ultimate authority, but allowed various religions in their territories some freedom, as long as they did not disrupt the *Pax Romana*. Thus, the Jewish authorities were able to enforce their established laws, which were not easy for the poor people living off the land to follow.

The crowds who came to hear Jesus were hungry for affirmation and acceptance, to know that God cared for them, regardless of any laws they inadvertently broke.

They were longing for healing—of their bodies and of their spirits. Jesus saw that, and understood.

Our Gospel lesson today skips over two major miracle stories (feeding the 5000, and Jesus walking on water), and focuses on Jesus reaching out to ordinary people. We read how he gave up his own rest and time for nourishment, so that he might feed them with his healing and his teaching. Jesus did not reach out, though, to be adored and have his power acclaimed. He reached out to teach and to embody God's love.

The early Christians still faced hurdles in understanding what their faith meant. The letter to the people of Ephesus, a largely Gentile city, reminded them that the old laws no longer applied. Laws about diets, about circumcision, about sacrifices and cleanliness could no longer divide them. They were united in God's love, and that was to be their focus.

So how are we doing today with this love and unity thing?

Those words are often tossed around; but it seems to me that they are meant to only apply to those people who belong to our culture, our political party, our religion. We are still divided, and we are still hungry! We are not hungry for more laws, nor for amusements and flattery. We are starving for basic needs, for equality and justice, for belonging, for freedom from fear. We long for good leadership that will truly unite us and bring us peace—on our streets, in our country, in our world. We are so hungry for the Word of God, who gave himself that we might know God's own love.

Perhaps, we need to acknowledge our own humanity—equal with every other child of God. Then we need to define whatever universal good it is we all seek; and we need to understand that this good is a right of every person—no matter their wealth, their education, their country, their religion. And then, we need to work together for the good of all humanity.

Not easy. But if we are truly followers of Jesus, we are united in God's love and in love for one another. Then, perhaps, we do not need to be hungry anymore. Amen.