

THE BREAD THAT SATISFIES OUR HUNGERS AND APPETITES

Sermon Notes by the Rev. Arnold Bush, 8.5.12; Priest in Charge, Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, Tallassee, AL Proper 13B, John 6: 24-35. V 27 *“Do not work for the food that parishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you.”*
Texts: *John 6:12 “When they were satisfied” NIT; PS 145:17 “You open wide your hand and satisfy the needs of every living creature.” Isa 55:2 “and you labor on what does not satisfy.”; John 6:35 “I am the bread of life, He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” Also, Hymn 335 “unless you eat of the of the flesh of the son of man you shall not have life within you.”*

Sermon Theme: We all have appetites and compulsions, but JESUS, THE BREAD OF LIFE, SUSTAINS AND OVERCOMES OUR COMPULSIONS AND ADDICTIONS

I. Introduction

I love to eat; I need that Tex-Mex fix at a Mexican restaurant in Birmingham.
I love beer and margaritas at Mexican restaurants
I love to eat all the time*
I love to work long and hard *
I love to get recognized, stroked
I love to exercise, swim, and walk
I love to compete in sports and love the outdoors+
I love to go to sports events, especially my alma mater, or MSU, college football
I love to shop often at the malls, but I really like to do business at Home Depot or Lowe’s
I love to travel all the time; I love to “make love” with my wife
I love chess and board games; with grandchildren

All these behaviors or drives will bring us a certain level of satisfaction. What are some of your cravings? Golf bug, TV bug, addicted to the Internet into the late hours, or those movies that come during the midnight hours? In last Sunday’s OT reading from II Samuel 11:1-15 we see King David’s lust for Bathsheba and his adulterous action, then his “cover up” to have Uriah killed in battle.

All of us have interests, cravings, appetites, compulsions, and addictions.
On your insert you can write down some of your cravings and appetites.
Interests/desires - cravings/strong appetite - compulsions/addictions
Brainstorm a list on left, draw a line to the left side.

This morning I am using the phrase in v.35: “He who believes in me will never go hungry and never thirst.” (John 4:13-14) The sermon is about how God wants to satisfy our desires, how Jesus overcomes our cravings, compulsions, and addictions. In the story of the feeding of the 5000, we see the concern of the disciples with a big problem: How to feed all these folks before nighttime.

In Psalm 105:17 “You open wide your hand and satisfy the needs of every living creature.” In the 6th chapter of John, the writer states, I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. (John 6:40)

v 33 "The bread of God gives life for the world"
Note the words in the Hymnal 335.

II. All drives and appetites are created in us by God

All these cravings and longings are symptoms to know the Transcendent Being
We must realize that God creates appetites within us. He placed these drives inside as part of our DNA.

1. The WILL TO LIVE AND SURVIVE and fight off diseases and destructive forces.
2. The desire to consume food so we are sustained in this world.
3. God placed sexual drives within us to keep the human race procreating itself. We all have the "urge to merge."
4. We crave medications and drugs that will alleviate pain and anxiety. Suppose we go to universities to anthropologists and philosophers who study human behavior. Most of these professors will say God has also created human beings with a craving and longing to know the Transcendent Being. Pascal said every person has a God-shaped vacuum within him or her.

III. We are wired with a God-shaped vacuum

This metaphor of the God-shaped vacuum has been stated various ways over the centuries.

Poets: a longing for God

Author of Genesis.: Adam was walking in the garden looking for God.

William James, philosopher of education in 1920s, said we have an innate seeking for the transcendent.

Carl Jung (psychiatrist from Switzerland): In his research of every culture he concluded humans are created with a searching for the mysterious experience of God.

Thus we have this God hole within us. Some have called this an Eternal Ever Lack. There is no one driving on the Gilmer Avenue or living in Elmore County who does not have an Eternal Ever Lack hole. I recall in my Inquirer's classes I would start off the first session with what is mankind's basic need. Lacking in a sense of purpose, meaning, lacking in a sense of belonging, lacking in a sense of being accepted.

A great deal of the literature I have read on chemical and non-chemical addictions reminds of that all our addictions and compulsions are symptoms. They are symptoms of our need of a very deep experience of love to begin to heal our compulsions.

IV. Alice and Adam have compulsions

Let us go back to our schematic: Desires, cravings, compulsions, and addictions. Let see this in the context of two persons, whom I call Alice and Adam.

Now just suppose that there is a very large screen in front of you with two human figures. On the screen we have very generic outlines of Alice and Adam. You want to begin to identify some of the compulsions prevalent today. The addictions of Alice and Adam:

Now Alice and Adam live in an upscale home in Elmore County, commuters to

Montgomery. Both are employed, educated. one to GT and the father from Auburn. They have children headed for Auburn and one to the University of Alabama.

Let's look at some of their middle class compulsions and appetites: They could be your grown children or at least live in your neighborhood.

1. They have an adrenaline addiction in exercising, cycling and participating in all the street runs in the area. They came in the first ten in the local 5K and 10K runs in Alabama. They have ribbons, newspaper clippings and trophies displayed in their home of these races.

2. A craving for shopping in the shopping malls and the large department stores. (JOKE regarding where one wishes to bury their ashes: on a family farm with the cows and horses in South Alabama. Honey, where do you want to be buried? At the Summit in Birmingham or outlet mall in Destin?)

3. They are somewhat perfectionists; their yard and house is always immaculate. Their children are dressed extremely neatly. Their anger can be set off quickly if things are not in the proper place.

4. They seem to have a work addiction: 50 to 70 hours to the point of almost neglecting their own relationship and their children. (A briefcase home every night. Dad always brings his reading reports home with him. His young son once asked, "Daddy you always have homework in your briefcase, are you a slow reader?")

5. Each have experienced the yo-yo dieting.; heavy consumption when going out to eat at the local restaurants.

6. Both very self-conscious about what image they are portraying to the public. To them the worst sin is dressing "tacky." They would be good models for *Vogue*.

7. They are somewhat heavy drinkers.. Been known for having too much at the cocktail parties, especially when stress increased at work. Some friends think they are bordering on alcoholism.

Needless to say. Alice and Adam appear very normal but somewhat discontented.. They are really searching, looking for something to give meaning in their lives.. Let's remember all their compulsions (addictions,) identified as snot evil in themselves. But God creates them within them. (Michael Phelps said after winning all his Olympic medals in China he became very depressed)

Their only visits to local churches are at family weddings and funerals of friends. They seem to have little interest in religion, for it is thought of as somewhat superstitious. They operate on the philosophy: "try harder," "work harder," "Do whatever makes you happy," "Always wanting more and more recognition."

Looking at the big picture, how they are filling their God-shaped vacuum? As stated in the passage, they are like the Jews in the Gospel lesson: They are lonely looking for that food which will satisfy the momentary need. Or in Psalm 78:29 *so they ate and were well filled, for he gave them what they craved.* Or in Isaiah *their toil and labor do not satisfy them.* They look only for instant gratification. They lack deep, real contentment. Jesus says " you work for food and possessions that will spoil. You do not seek food that endures and gives you life." (John 6:27)

V. One Theory: Their compulsions tend to act like an anesthetic to eliminate the pain and memories of past hurts.

During this month of August, I suggest you sit down to reflect on your compulsions like we did with Alice and Adam. Create a list of your interests, where you spend your time. Are there some of your behaviors in which you are trying to fill your God-shaped vacuum, your Eternal Ever Lack?

VI. Some personal compulsions

Here are a few examples from my child hood:

(1) As an athletic in high school and college, I thought that one must always give 110 % in every game or should not be playing. I've got to do well so everyone compliment me. I wanted family and friends to be proud of me. It was later in life that I really began to enjoy the games without having to win all the time. If we lost a game I went into a depression for a few days., causing me not to study or not try to make good grades.. Winning was everything.

(2) While growing up I remember the message I received was a compulsion to always be nice, always behave well, I would not disappoint my parents. Now look, Arnold, you live in a big three-story brick home on 6th Avenue in Laurel, MS. We don't want anyone in this family misbehaving. My compulsions and motivations to be a "good little boy" were always an external motivation. so my parents would love me. The internal motive to behave and be good came much later in life. (You know one thing about clergy, we are paid to be good, but laypersons in the church are "good for nothing.")

(3) I grew up in the road construction business. My parents had a demanding work ethic and little appreciation of reflective thought. My parental message was: "Around here we do not tolerate laziness, sleeping late, reading so many books and taking rest periods. What are you, a book worm?" I was always rewarded by completing a road construction project, working day and night, and getting the project finished before resting or taking a day off or go to church. I was always seeking approval from uncles and my father in the road construction business. From this strong drive to always overwork, I entered adult life without a clue about compulsion to perform or to work. This almost cost me my marriage and family. David Seamands wrote a book called *Performance Trap*. I remember a few months ago he was lecturing and describing my life to the tee.

In the month of August, The Holy Spirit is feeding you every Sunday around this altar. Examine yourself. As in the Gospel story, God is multiplying his moments of grace in your life. He is saying, bring me the breadcrumbs of your life, the bumps and bruises in your life, and I will fill that vacuum in your life. How are you filling the God-shaped vacuum or the Jesus hole within you? What are you taking in as a substitute for the Bread of Life? Are you taking in the Bread of Life, flooding you with contented satisfaction?

**VII . Let me remind us that I am speaking about
Our deepest cravings and hungers, our most basic needs as a human being.**

If you had Psychology 101 in college you were exposed to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs from physiological, safety, love/belonging, self-actualization. Later criticisms of Maslow have claimed there is a longing or craving for experiencing the transcendent, God.

In the beatitudes, Jesus says "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.*" (Matt. 5:6) I love the way Eugene Peterson paraphrases this verse: "Blessed are those who have a big appetite for God."

You and I are here because we have an appetite of Christ. What is your appetite for God? Do you have an appetite for spiritual matters? What about Alice and Adam? Maybe sometimes we lose our appetite for God and drift away from Him.

In last Sunday's Gospel in the feeding of the 5000, Jesus went to a deserted place. But when the crowds heard it, they had a spiritual appetite for Jesus; they followed him on foot from the towns. When evening came the disciples were aware of the physical appetite for food so they suggested sending them away to the villages to buy food.

Jesus did the four acts we know in the Eucharist: He looked up to the heaven to give thanks, blessed the bread and fish, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples to distribute.

I commend all who are here his summer Sunday. You also walked on foot some of the way and you will be given bread and wine to meet your appetite for spiritual food.

Listen to a paraphrase of the words of Jesus in John's Gospel regarding the way he satisfies our appetites: Jesus, the Bread of Life has come down from heaven EVERY SUNDAY, EVERY SUNDAY, HERE. The Bread we receive at the communion rail gives us life, gives us food that does not spoil, gives us food for a quality of life that is ours to enjoy.

As I look back on my life and the lives of parishioners, I notice there are periods in my life I have attempted to fill the God-shaped void in my life with intense activities, too much work, wanting to purchase something I do not need at Sam's, Home Depot or Lowes. Some of us have phases in our life when we do not have boundaries on our compulsions. Often, I have unintentionally shut out the Holy Spirit, closed the door to the grace God wants to give me. As I allow Jesus to feed my soul, in conversational prayer, meditations, scripture reading there is a direct proportion to my living a life overflowing with satisfaction.

Back in my early twenties, I made a commitment that I would participate in Holy Communion every Sunday in my life--yes, even on vacations or traveling. If I am on vacation or retired, I do not have to make a decision if I am going to Eucharist. (Last Sunday, sleeping in a motel in Waukegan, IL, I attended the 7:30 am Eucharist with 35 older adults in a facility with no AC.) The decision is where I am going. Over the years I have not been faithful to a lot of commitments, but I have kept up this commitment.

When I am present to Christ in the Eucharist and He comes into my life through the elements of bread and wine, I know that he is feeding the deepest craving in my heart. Not every Eucharist is a high spiritual chill bump experience, but using the image of the Yeast from last Sunday, He has injected me with his power in the bread and wine.

The spirit of the Tenth commandment deals with this issue of craving, coveting or lacking in satisfaction. As you know, the 10th commandment reads: "*Thou shall not covet your neighbor's house, your neighbor wife, nor his servant, nor his maid nor yard man, nor his ox, nor this ass nor anything that is his.*"

Here is the Arnold Bush paraphrase of the Tenth commandment: You shall not covet his automobile, his servants, nanny, his plush swimming pool and immaculate yard, his three-story house on Lake Martin or the Gulf of Mexico, his cabin in the mountains in North Carolina, the boat in his garage, nor his annual trips around the world, nor his or her intelligence.

This idea of "I want" was on the local radio stations some time ago. The radio commercial came on when I was in market for a new car. "I want this car... I want to feel the steering wheel. I want to hear the stereo system... I want to kick the tires... I want to sit back in the soft bucket seats... I want It now...I can feel it ...I can dream it.... Just drive into the closest GM dealer near you... It can be yours." If I buy this I will really be satisfied. This commercial struck a chord in me. By owning that new car, will it really want will give me satisfaction?

Here are a few illustrations of allowing Christ the Bread of Heaven to satisfy our deepest needs:

(1) I was visiting with a young man who was in his late twenties. He had a good selling position, liked his job, enjoyed reading, enjoyed golf, tennis and skiing and movies. He said something like this to me, " You know, Father Arnold, I realize I could increase the number of calls on my customers, I could increase my commissions. I could increase this every year.. There is something about life that is boring. I can beat my brains out by increasing my sales. but something was not giving me satisfaction. I am really looking for something meaningful in this life."

What is this person saying between the lines? Consuming a life of activities that do not give meaning. He is going through the motions of working and playing, but something is LACKING. He is implying I need some spiritual food that gives me life. In short. he needs Jesus to fill his God-shaped vacuum.

(2) Let's go back to Adam and Alice. I remember visiting with a couple that had been worshipping with us about a year and participating in a small group. They said something had been happening to them in the past few months. Before finding an Episcopal Church they were both very unhappy people, they were fighting all the time, over worked, spending too much, running up high bills on charge cards, taking too many trips. The wife was so unhappy she wanted to move back to their hometown in South Alabama. They continued, " Whatever has happened in the past few months since we have been here has been successful for us. There is a satisfaction about life, a peace of mind has come into our lives." Using our metaphor of the lesson, they have allowed Jesus, the Bread of Life to replace their cravings.

Poets, philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, and theologians have stated in various ways that God has wired us with a God-shaped vacuum. God's desire is to fill our hearts with his presence. When these deepest cravings and desires are not met with God's living in us, we

**will attempt to fill it with desires, cravings, strong appetites, compulsions and addictions.
Lord help us not to lose our appetite for your grace and presence.**

Prayer: Thanks for feeding our souls and bodies with the Bread of Life.