

I. Introduction:

"Hungry? Snickers really satisfies" (*pull out a Snickers bar*)

That was the advertising slogan a few years ago for this candy bar. Now I know it was funny seeing a person on TV saying & doing embarrassing things simply because "you're not you when you're hungry". But I hope you & I have the wisdom to see the patent falsehood of such advertising. I think nutritionists will tell you that a candy bar does not really satisfy hunger. In fact, all the sugar in it will make you hungrier. <https://prezi.com/4n6vwoondtph/does-snickers-really-satisfy/>

In the beginning, God provided us with food to satisfy the normal experience of physical hunger. There was nothing wrong with Adam & Eve eating from the bounty that God had provided. But sometimes we hunger for things that won't truly satisfy.

The candy bar ad is just one example of our culture's misplaced values around *food*:

- Many of us are snacking constantly at home, or even at work ... we make it a point to never be out of reach of something to munch on
 - If we're always eating ... do we even know what hunger really feels like?
- In our culture, there is an insatiable desire for novel foods, gourmet foods.
 - Whoever heard of kale, hummus, wasabi or Frappuccino 20 years ago?
 - There's nothing wrong with these ... But something is amiss when good basic foods are no longer good enough ... no longer satisfy ... when we think we have to drive ever farther and spend ever more money to satisfy us.

What we hunger for is not always what we most need. Jesus knew that in the first of the wilderness temptations he faced, in our text from Matthew 4. Satan pushed Jesus to turn stones into bread ... feed people's stomachs ... gather a following for himself by satisfying the lowest common denominator in people.

But Jesus knew how fleeting is the power of bread. He knew humanity hungers for things much deeper and more eternal than physical bread. He knew that spiritual sustenance from God is ultimately satisfying in a much greater way than mere bread.

II. There are many things we hunger for in life. Too often we hunger for things that do not truly satisfy.

A. We are still fresh from a tumultuous national election, so I invite you to join me just beyond a campaign trail somewhere in a western democracy, as described by Tom Wright in his commentary, *Matthew for Everyone* (Part One, Westminster-John Knox Press, 2004, pp. 23-25)

Jennifer went for a long walk in the woods. It had been an exhausting six months, and she needed time to think.

Text: (1 Cor. 6: 15-17; John 6:35); Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Matt. 4:1-11

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She had concentrated on the campaign. Ever since her local party had told her, to her surprise, they wanted her to be their candidate, she had been overwhelmed by the honor both of running for Parliament and of serving her people, her country, the world. All the noble ideals had been smiling at her, beckoning her, telling her that she was now going to be able to achieve them. Her one thought had been: get elected, and at last you'll be able to change the world! To make things better. To turn things around.

Then the last frantic days of the campaign. Touring the area, shaking hands, making speeches, late-night sessions with party workers, snatched sleep, too much coffee, more speeches, more handshakes. And finally the election. She still couldn't believe it. Victory by 10,000 votes. They had wanted her! They had chosen her. This was her day, and it was sweet.

But she needed space to think, to reflect, to work it all through. Hence the long walk in the woods by herself. She was shocked at what she discovered. The ideals were still there – the dreams of service, of changing the world. But what were these other voices?

'Now at last,' they whispered, 'you've got a chance to make some real money. Lots of businesses will want you on their board, to lobby the government for them. You can name your price.'

'This is just the first rung on the ladder,' said the voices. 'If you play your cards well, if you don't make a fuss about too many things, and get to know the right people, you could be a government minister ... in the Cabinet ... fame and popularity ... press conferences, TV appearances ...'

What was happening? Where were these voices coming from? But there was more.

'Think what you could do now,' the voices whispered. 'That party activist you've never liked – you could get rid of him. You've got power. And you'll have more. The world is your chessboard. Go ahead and play the game your way!'

1. I'd like to think that all those candidates elected last fall found ways, like Jennifer, to put those voices in their place and follow their higher calling of public service
2. Sometimes, when given a little **power**, we hunger for much more ... or we hunger for the personal gain that can come with that power
3. In verses 8 & 9 of Matt. 4, Jesus knew those tempting voices as well as Jennifer did (*read*) ...
 - a) to have the splendor of all the kingdoms of the world under his control and at his disposal ... To watch people jump the instant he said, "Jump!"
 - b) But he also knew that this power came at the cost of idolatry ... of worshiping something or someone else more than his heavenly Father

Text: (1 Cor. 6: 15-17; John 6:35); Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Matt. 4:1-11

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B. There are many things we hunger for in life

Todd is a 42-year-old man with a wonderful wife and two kids. His marriage is solid and he loves his wife, the only sexual partner he's ever had, but he is dogged with shame over his pattern of occasionally accessing porn images online.

He knows it's hurtful to his wife, but he just can't stop. He does get helpful accountability from an addiction recovery group he attends. The group has helped him see that his reaching for porn is really a misplaced attempt to medicate some other internal pain he feels, like loneliness, resentment, or distance from God.

1. Todd's recovery friends are helping him recognize that explicit sexual images are merely a poor substitute for the deeper intimacy he really hungers for ...
2. It's an intimacy that can partially be found in marriage but is truly only found in close communion with the loving God who made him
3. In 1 Cor. 6 & 7, the Apostle Paul was dealing with various kinds of sexual relationships and sexual sins.

a) Paul recognized that *sex* is not only physical, it also has a very spiritual aspect when he reminded us of our bodies as members of Christ.

b) Paul quoted part of the extended creation story from Gen. 2, when he said, "The two shall be one flesh",

As a way to support his argument against sex outside of marriage, this is what he said in I Cor. 6:17 – *But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.*

It may surprise you that Paul applies similar sexual language from the creation story, to our relationship with Christ!

4. In other words, sex in marriage is one of the ways God intended for our desire for intimacy to be expressed, along with other ways like prayer and solitude, friendships, and healthy family relationships.

C. As I said, there are many things we hunger for in life

As friends retire and age and have to downsize, I hear them lamenting all the sorting, shedding and decision-making that goes along with moving to a smaller home or a retirement community

1. Over and over I hear people say, "How did I end up with all this stuff? I didn't need 3 hedge trimmers, 2 dozen screwdrivers and a gazillion assorted screws!"

a) When I look around my own house, basement and garage, I get the same sinking feeling ... Why do I have all this stuff?

Actually, I think I know. I recognize that hunger: It's the hunger for *self-sufficiency* ... total autonomy

I want to do what I want to do, when I want to do it

Text: (1 Cor. 6: 15-17; John 6:35); Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Matt. 4:1-11

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I don't want to depend on anyone else's tools, and I don't want to burden anybody by asking. Sound familiar to anyone?

b) When we hunger for self-sufficiency:

we keep acquiring more & more stuff ...

or we keep getting more educational degrees and certificates so we have the skills to do things ourselves

c) This hunger is good ... up to a point, but too often it isolates us from others in our community, wastes resources, and makes us prideful people

2. In our Genesis texts this hunger for self-sufficiency showed up in Eve's choice for the forbidden fruit

a) How tantalizing to hear the serpent say that eating the fruit would make her and her husband like God!

b) If we eat this fruit, we'll be our own bosses ... we'll call the shots ... and not be dependent on others!

III. You may identify with several of these hungers

A. Perhaps 1 or 2 of them in particular are a struggle for you

1. Like Jennifer the politician, we all face distractions & voices trying to persuade us of what will satisfy our current hungering ... or perhaps rouse to life a hungering we hadn't been aware of
2. Like Todd's recovery group, I invite you to consider what are the deeper hungers you're experiencing?
3. What are the primal longings lurking below the surface levels of how you approach food, or sex, or power or self-sufficiency?

B. In this Lenten season, we become especially aware of our failures, our limitations, our shortcomings before God

1. We move toward an acute awareness of how far we fall short of God's original hopes and dreams for us, God's beloved creatures
2. In short, Lent brings us to cry out, "Restore us, O God!"

C. Our Lenten texts today invite us to pay attention to our deepest hungers.

1. Jesus knew and faced all of the hungers that we face: the shallow superficial ones ... and the deeper foundational ones.
2. By His example in the Scriptures and through the Holy Spirit, He points us to God as our ultimate provider for these hungers.
3. Part of God's restoration work in us is to get us to recognize our common shallow hungers, as the false hopes that they really are:

- a) We do not live by bread alone but by every Word from God's mouth
- b) Power to do good can so easily be corrupted into selfish games that prove how Yahweh has been dethroned as our God
- c) Sex in our society is a rampant cheap substitute for true intimacy
- d) And the rugged independence so zealously cherished in our society often serves merely to mask our own fierce pride ...

a pride that means ultimately the god we truly serve is not the God of the Bible, but the God of OURSELVES!

IV. Conclusion

A. This morning we offer the Lord's Supper as a tangible connection to the theme of our hungers

1. Having a special symbolic meal seems like an obvious ritual to do for this Sunday, but as I reflected on it, I had 2nd thoughts about whether it really reinforces the message of God satisfying our deeper hungers
2. On one level, by having real bread & juice, the physicality of the Lord's Supper may actually cheapen our holy desire to come to God with our deep hungers
 - a) After all, what are you getting when you come for communion? I can't stand up here & put salvation on a little plate for you.
 - b) I can't pour true intimacy with God in a little cup for you to drink.
3. On the other hand, as symbols, the bread and the juice are brilliantly effective ...
 - a) As we feel them in our mouths and taste them going down, they focus our attention on Jesus' gift of himself to us, a gift that was very real and very physical.
 - b) He made a real sacrifice of himself for us ... not a theoretical sacrifice or an imaginary one
 - c) Taking actual food and drink reminds us of the words of our Savior who said in John 6:35, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

B. What are you hungry for ... really hungry for?

1. May the 1st thing these symbols of the bread and the cup do, be to remind you of where you truly need restoration in your life
2. Then may the 2nd thing they do be to point you toward the One who came so that you would hunger no more for those deeper things