

A Pentecost 13 2017

Matthew 15:21-28

30 seconds: Turn to your neighbor and tell them when was the last time you ate? Now who is still hungry? What if I had cake for everyone. Who could find room for a piece of cake?

Jesus said: *It isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.* And the woman said: *That's true but even the dogs eat the leftovers that fall from their master's table.*

In reflecting on those words, a friend of mine, Don

Elephante told about an experience he had in his native Baltimore.

He grew up in a working class neighborhood, but poverty was pushing in from all sides.

One day he saw a woman he knew to be poor and barely able to feed her children.

She was pulling a rusty wagon and in that wagon was dog food. Don was outraged and he told a friend that he was angry that a woman who could barely feed her children would spend money to feed a dog.

His friend stopped him short and simply said, "*The woman has no dog.*"

Don told me that it was his first real glimpse of hunger in America.

I think my grandmother knew hunger. She was one of 13 children and she grew up in Edinburgh, Scotland at a time when that country was in a depression.

The family did not starve but they did go hungry at times. To escape that poverty my grandparents moved to the US when my father was a toddler.

America was the promised land, but when they got here, we too were in a depression and again she knew hunger.

Nana never forgot those years.

All the time I knew her, she set out even the simplest of meals with great care—always a knife and fork and spoon, a centerpiece, matching dishes, napkin and prayer.

And all were welcome to her table.

I suspect some of you remember or have heard of hungry times in your family, especially if you lived during the depression: Maybe some of you know about catchup soup made from packets of catchup saved from the diner and a little hot water or you might know how a can of tuna can feed 8 people with enough crackers added.

And if you are observant, you may discover that there is hunger even here in Neenah.

For most of us hunger means the cravings that come with dieting or a growling stomach when a meal is missed or delayed.

But **there is a difference between craving and real hunger.**

A craving will go away. Hunger does not go away until we are fed food that will give us life.

Today's texts are about hunger: A woman asks Jesus for help; she wants her daughter to be healed.

The disciples want her away and for a moment it looks like Jesus will agree.

In Hebrew eyes, she does not deserve help.

She is an outsider. She is not one of the chosen.

She is a woman—asking for a daughter.

She is a foreigner.

She is a Canaanite, so not from the tribe of Israel.

But she is hungry! She is hungry for Jesus' grace and love.
And Jesus feeds hungry people.

Faith is more than belief.

Faith is a hunger for God's love and salvation.

In this woman, Jesus recognized a hungry faith and so he fed her need by healing her daughter, that very hour.

And by doing so, he invited her into his circle of love.

Whether we ate breakfast or not we came hungry, hungry for God's love and salvation.

And we are hungry a sense of welcome and belonging.

As individuals we come hungry for forgiveness and direction and purpose in our lives.

And we hunger for assurance that God will hear our prayers and know our pain.

Most of all we are hungry for the promise of eternal life and salvation found in Jesus Christ.

And as a congregation, we come hungry.

Hungry for a word of hope, when the news seems hopeless.

Hungry for reconciliation with one another and in the world

Hungry for justice and mercy.

We hunger for connection to others in the body of Christ and a future that is open to progress and new life.

This week in particular as we watch the events in Charlottesville and Barcelona unfold and the world's response, today we come hungry for peace and unity.

All of today's text are about the kind of unity that we desire and God's radical welcome to those who might be considered outsiders.

An African American colleague, who attended my seminary and was an assistant to the Bishop in Milwaukee, admitted that though he has the privilege of education and respect in his own community, he **wondered if he would be welcome in congregations that did not know who he was.**

If he was simply a black man coming to worship...hungry for the word, would he be welcome in our pews or at our table.

A gay woman asked the same question.

I pray to God that we would be quick to welcome all who hunger for God's promises.

We should be outraged whenever we witness discrimination, hate, or violence. We should be outraged but we should also be motivated to work for change and recognize that the place to begin is right here.

The bible gives us a model for change. Personal change and community change.

Pray Fast Act. Our Lenten disciplines are rooted in this tradition.

Write it down. Say it 3 times. Do what you need to do to remember it. **Pray Fast Act. Pray Fast Act. Pray Fast Act.**

So, what can we do in light of the recent surge of hate, violence and white supremacist activity? I am only going to

talk about Charlottesville but the model is helpful wherever change is needed.

Always we begin with prayer. We pray mightily. In the case of Charlottesville we pray for the community, We pray for the families of Thirty-two-year-old Heather Heyer and the 2 police trooper pilots Bates and Cullenthose, who died in a helicopter crash during the violence.

We pray for imagination and creativity that a peaceful solution may be found, and yes we pray for both sides.

Jesus called us to pray for our enemies.

And here is the hard part, our prayers must include confession. We must look to ourselves and engage our own blind spots.

In two weeks my sermon will be about prayer and we are going to once again send out weekly prayers to your phone.

Fast. I have been talking this morning about hunger.

Fasting helps us recognize our own hunger and need for a Savior.

Fasting in this case can include fasting or refraining from racist humor or any humor that hurts others, fasting from stereotypes or assumptions, fasting from quick answers or volatile speech.

Fast from comparing our experiences of prejudice to that of others.

Finally Act. Here is just a few ideas.

Educate yourselves. Read, read read.

And listen. Go to teach-ins, workshops and even rallies to hear what our African American brothers and sisters are

saying, and believe them. Stand in an attitude of trust that they are speaking their truth.

Call or write your representatives.

Engage in difficult discussions with others.

Give. Give to organizations that fight racism.

This one you are already doing. Every time you put an offering in the offering plate, a portion of that goes to the ELCA which has been fighting racism for decades.

And most of all, Love.

Remember that Jesus died for all. He enlarged every circle of who is “in.”

We love because Jesus died and rose so that we might be included “in” the promise of salvation.

Jesus Christ feeds our every hunger with food that truly gives us new life.

This is the good news of the gospel.