

Spiritually Hangry

In the late 70's my church, Berkley First United Methodist, had a youth group called MYF, Methodist Youth Fellowship. I was really active in that group. And every summer we would go on a canoe trip for a week on the AuSable river. This was rustic camping, no showers, no bathrooms, just the wild and us and we loved it. It was the thing we all looked forward to every summer.

Until the one summer, when we got new volunteers to help with the youth group and the canoe trip.

These people were like survivalist trained or something, I am not sure. But we couldn't bring snacks of our own. We could only eat when they said we could eat. Our snacks were beef jerky and I remember lining up begging for beef jerky because we didn't know the next time we could eat.

I remember one night we were all so hungry after we set up camp for the night. The leaders, the survivalists made dinner and they made it from a whole chicken out of a can, I am not sure you can even buy that anymore and mixed it with rice. Now remember it was a whole chicken which means it still had the bones in it. All they did was chop up the chicken with the bones in it and boil it with some rice.

We all stood in line, looking pathetic with our bowls, so very hungry. When we got our "meal" we sat down and began wolfing it down. Only to realize that we were crunching on bones as we ate it. But we were so hungry, we didn't care!

I don't know about you but when I am really hungry, I stop being nice. My hands start to shake and I am only focused on one thing: Food. I need a cheeseburger and I need one now! But think about this, when I am hungry, dehydrated, lacking protein and my blood sugar is out of whack, how am I supposed to be a pleasant person?

Now, I know that I am not the only one who gets like this. There is even a word that describes people like this. "Hangry". It puts those two words together. "hungry" and "angry". Hangry is an adjective used to describe this feeling of overwhelming hunger, frustration, anger, irritability and emotion.

I am sure that most of you have experienced this on some level at one point or another in your lives. Do you know that feeling that I'm talking about? Where you are hungry, but are too cranky to do anything about it; where someone is offering to cook you something or take you somewhere to eat but you cannot decide what you want or where you want to go; where you know you are whining but you can't stop yourself; where something you normally find endearing or adorable is infuriating; and where you almost need to put yourself in time out until you eat, drink, rest and let your body balance itself out again.

Food is obviously an important part of our lives. In addition to the mere deliciousness of flavors and different styles of cuisine, food is essential to our survival as human beings. We need food to nourish our bodies; very often how we exist in bodily form is directly related to the food that we put into our bodies.

So you see why I need a cheeseburger, or when in desperation, I will eat chicken and bones with the crunch that goes along with it!

With food being so crucial to our existence as human beings, I do not think that it is a coincidence that there are so many stories and metaphors about food in the Gospels. And so I was thinking about what it feels like to be “hangry” as I read the scripture for this week.

Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

I think the use of bread was intentional here. Think about it; Jesus didn’t say, “I am the perfectly balanced garden salad of life.” He said, “I am the bread of life.” I am the nourishing and filling and comforting and warm and soft and garlic-oil dipped and mouthwatering bread of life.

When I had a youth group in a different church we participated in a 30 hour famine. Where the youth come to the church on Friday and literally don’t eat anything for 30 hours straight. We study and learn about famine all over the world and raise money for each hour we don’t eat. The fast is broken after 30 hours with communion.

Now we are all so hungry by the time we broke our fast that once we all took communion, we continued to pass the loaf of bread around the circle until every last piece of bread had been eaten.

In that moment of hunger, that bread was exactly what we needed.

And I think in those moments of spiritual hunger that we all experience in our lives, the bread of life is exactly what we need as well.

Have you ever been “spiritually hangry” in your life?

When you need God in your life but are too far away from your spiritual center to do anything about it or to figure out how to get it back.

When you want to go to church, but just can’t seem to get yourself there, even on zoom!

When you feel a little off – personally, professionally, financially, and in your relationships – and you cannot get yourself back on track.

When you know that you are on the verge of a meltdown and have lost sight of the bigger picture, but cannot reign yourself back in.

When you feel like you need to pray but cannot quiet your mind long enough to do it.

When the stressors and anxieties of your day-to-day life have gotten louder than the voice of God assuring you of grace, love and redemption.

When you need a one hour Sunday morning time out so that your body, mind and soul can balance itself out again.

“Spiritually hangry” may not be the most theological of terms, but I think I might be on to something here. Because this is something that we all experience throughout our lives. We all experience those moments where we are so far past the point of being spiritually hungry that we get a little lethargic and little angry and we don’t know what end is up.

But Jesus said:

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Living bread: this means that the nourishment and the healing and the wisdom and the love that Jesus offered during his earthly life is still alive and at work today. This living bread continues to nourish us in our moments of spiritual hunger. This living bread gives healing to our pain, love to our hatred, wisdom to our confusion and strength to our weakness.

The Gospel is more than a collection of stories about Jesus life' and the Good News that brings light into the darkness of our world; the Gospel is a promise of living nourishment in our lives: Living nourishment that is filling and comforting and warm and soft and garlic oil dipped and mouth watering. Living nourishment that gives us exactly what we need when we need it.

I know that every single one of us here today is struggling with something in our lives. And do you know how I know this? Because you would not be human if you weren't. We live in an imperfect world and we all have real struggles, we all make mistakes and we all face scary challenges. And there are moments in our lives where we are broken and empty and weak and need that living bread to come from heaven to nourish us, to fill us up, and ot make us whole. There are moments in our lives when we are "spiritually hangry" and we need to stop and eat.

In the same way that you will be "hangry" until you eat something, you will be "spiritually hangry" until you feast on that living bread of life.

This is why it is so important for us all to be a part of this church. We need to (all of us – myself included) come to worship, be part of the church community, ask questions, wrestle with scripture, support one another on our journeys, pray for and with one another, be humbled by one another, love unconditionally and live out our faith in our day to day lives.

We need to be reminded of the promise of God's love and grace through our laughter and tears. We need to see God's light shining in our children, in our friendships, in our music, in our activities and in our service to others. We need a place where we are allowed to be the most broken version of ourselves.

Nadia Bolz Weber describes the shame that often keeps us from feasting on Jesus. She says "It's hard to accept not just that God welcomes all but that God welcomes all of me, all of you. Even that within us we wish to hide; the part that cursed at our children this week, or drank alone, or has a problem with lying, or hates our body. That part within us that suffers from depression and can't admit it, or is too fearful to give our money away or is riddled with shame over our sexuality, or cheats on taxes. All these parts of us we wish Jesus had the good sense to not welcome to his table, are invited to taste and see that God is good."

We need to let God quench our spiritual hanger so that our bodies our minds and our souls can be nourished in a way that is divine and grace filled.

So as we partake in communion, remember to feast on Jesus, the living bread that continues to nourish us and give us strength. Amen.