

# Good Eats

a sermon

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Matthew 14:13-21

Isaiah 55:1-5

It's become a bit less common in my house. But it used to be the words you'd most often hear: "I'm hungry."

What's surprising to me about the occasions when I hear those words (and, yes, even from myself) is how often they correspond to a rejection of various items that could satisfy that hunger.

"How about a turkey sandwich?"

"No."

"Grilled cheese?"

"Nah."

"Noodles and sauce?"

"Uh-uh." "We've got those leftovers from last night."

"Nnnnn."

Eventually, of course, this ends, and if the young adult (or the middle-aged dude) is truly hungry he will decide on what to eat, and the cry of "I'm hungry" will stop.

For awhile.

Until next time.

I sometimes wonder if part of the problem is the glut of TV shows dedicated to fine food. I wonder if this makes the indecisiveness of "I'm hungry" more extreme, because it's made me and my boys more picky. Or maybe we were always that way, and these shows have just helped us hone our skills.

Actually, some of these TV shows are quite good. They're well produced, and they're helpful.

One such show is *Good Eats*, starring Alton Brown. Alton brings a mixture of science and humor to his show, which focuses in each episode on a particular food or dish or skill. He explains what combination of ingredients and techniques makes some dish good and why, all to help you understand, and appreciate, food that is truly good, what Alton calls "Good Eats."

Now maybe Alton's efforts can make us more picky. But I'd rather say that it instead may make us more *choosy*, more discerning about what food we eat, how we prepare it, even how we serve it. And that can give us more enjoyment with our food, so we're not just shoveling it in but rather we're appreciating it. Maybe even giving thanks for it, for the good eats that it is, thanks even for the *Giver* of those good eats.



Our Gospel reading describes one of the ultimate good eats moments.

It happened when Jesus and his disciples were in the middle of an “I’m hungry” moment, one that had arrived at a most inconvenient time.

They were out in the middle of nowhere, “a deserted place” the Bible calls it, far from any village or hamlet. Jesus had gone there to be alone, so he could mourn the death of John the Baptist, which he knew was a foreshadowing of his own death.

He needed to think.

He needed to pray.

But the crowds had followed him there, seeking his help, as they always did. So the retreat had ended almost as soon as it had begun. And now he was surrounded by people, hungry people.

They were literally hungry, in need of food after a long day. But it’s also true that they were hungry for other, deeper things:

for his attention,  
for his touch,  
for his healing,  
for *him*.

Near the end of the day, it was the disciples, ever the practical sort, who recognized the literal, physical hunger of the crowd, and urged Jesus to send them on their way. After all, there were no McDonalds or Burger Kings next door, no Tops or Wegmans. If these people were going to eat, they had best get on their way to make it to the villages before it got too late, before the shops closed, so they could buy food to feed themselves.

But Jesus doesn’t send them away. Instead, he turns it back on the disciples. “*You feed them.*”

“What? You’ve got to be kidding, Jesus. We can’t feed them. There are too many, and we have too little.”

“*What do you have? Show me the food you have.*”

“Aw, Jesus, all we’ve got are these five loaves and these two fish.”

“*That should be enough.*”

“Huh? Well, whatever you say, Jesus.”

So there, in the middle of nowhere, Jesus meets the sudden and inconvenient hunger of the crowd with what appears to be very little. But it turns out that it was plenty.

They were fed.  
They were filled.  
Their hunger was satisfied,  
more deeply than they could have expected,  
with *his* good eats.



That’s the way it is with Jesus. You come to him hungry, perhaps not even certain what you are hungry *for*. But he knows that you’re hungry; he already knows this. Even better, he

knows what will satisfy your hunger. And then he gives you, not what you want, not what you *think* you need, but what you *really* need.

For those aren't the same thing. Many people are hungry. But what they think will stop their hunger may be quite different from what they truly need. And Jesus knows this.

He knows that this person hungers for possessions.  
And he knows that this one hungers for physical intimacy.  
He knows that that man there,  
    he hungers for alcohol.  
And he knows that that woman there hungers for control,  
    so she may master the fear that plagues her.

He knows that they have these hungers. And he knows that what gives rise to these hungers is an emptiness far deeper and more profound than these hungers. It is, he knows, a God-shaped emptiness, a hole that can be filled only by God.

The people that came to Jesus that day, they were hungry. Sure, at the end of the day, they were literally hungry, needing run of the mill, regular food. But *earlier*, what drove them to seek out Jesus was also hunger, a deeper hunger. They may have felt it

as the hunger for healing,  
or perhaps the hunger for purpose,  
or maybe the hunger for restoration,  
or even the hunger for meaning.

And beneath all these,

    pushing up from the roots of their souls,  
    perhaps unacknowledged,  
    perhaps even unrecognized,

was the deepest hunger. They were hungry for *Jesus*, because, somehow, they knew that *he* could fill that empty spot, he could touch their hunger, he could feed them: with good eats, with the food of God.



I have to tell you: those people, they make me wonder. You see, they were so hungry, and they expressed their hunger in their passion with which they sought out Jesus, by following him into the hinterlands.

Did you notice that? They walked for miles into the middle of nowhere to see him!  
Now *that's* hunger!

I read this, I read about their neediness and their willingness to express their need, to show their *hunger*, and I wonder. Now, not so much about *them* do I wonder. I wonder ... about *us*.

For I'm sorry to say this, but I really don't see much of that hunger among us.

Now that may sound harsh, and it may sound unfair. And if so, I do regret that. But when I compare us with those people in our Bible lesson, those people who chased Jesus across miles of desolate territory to be near him and to be touched by him, I find almost no comparison.

For they were *passionate* in their hunger for Jesus, and they *acted* on it.

And us?

Well, sure, there are signs of that passion among us, scattered signs. But at the same time, there are more abundant signs that our passions and hungers for *other* things are stronger and more decisive.

*Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?*

I see among us a widespread neglect of those things through which the hunger for God and his Christ is expressed and fed:

*Worship*, surely on Sunday morning, but also as an individual practice of regular prayer. And not only as a matter of physically showing up (yet that is important) but also as showing up at worship emotionally and spiritually and with an expectation to hear something life-changing and a desire to be changed.

*Lifelong learning*, whether that be Sunday School or Bible studies or discipleship groups or something else by which we can learn and grow in scriptural understanding and spiritual wisdom.

*Service and mission*, not as something to which you write a check, but as something that you yourself *do*.

Sure, these things happen, with a few of us. But I find it telling that participation in these continues to decline. And it concerns me. For I wonder: what is to become of a congregation

that expresses such little hunger for Jesus,  
that shows such little interest in the good eats that will meet our deepest  
hungers,  
that sees the ways Christ graciously feeds us as merely optional,  
from which many in fact often *opt out*?

What is to become of such a congregation?

I won't answer that question, not by myself. I want us to answer that question together. But not literally or even directly. I want us to answer it, together, in action, with what we do,

by expressing our hunger once again,  
by participating eagerly in Christ's gifts that meet that our deepest hunger,  
by becoming a congregation truly hungry for the nourishment Jesus gives.

And I have hope that this will happen, and even is happening, quietly, right now, in the hearts and in the lives of some of you. I have this hope, because I know that God invites us to his banquet, we who cannot afford it, we who do not deserve it, but God invites us anyway, paying the price and making us able to enjoy God's good eats.

*Ho, everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters;*

*and you that have no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price.  
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,  
and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me;  
listen, so that you may live.*

Yes, I do hope. I hope for us to become a congregation that is hungry for the Word of God, and lives out this hunger by studying, both alone and together, God's Word written.

I hope for us to become a congregation that is hungry for the Lord's Supper, and lives out this hunger by coming to the sacrament with joy and anticipation, eager to receive Christ's body and blood so we may be sustained and more truly formed into his likeness.

I hope for us to become a congregation that is hungry for fellowship with Christ, and lives out this hunger by more consistent participation in worship and in prayer groups and in service together and in simply learning how to love each other.

I hope for us to become a congregation that is hungry to follow Jesus in service, and lives out this hunger by rediscovering the potential for active mission that God has placed in each one of us.

I hope for us to become a congregation that is hungry for ever greater understanding of the dimensions of discipleship, and lives out this hunger by seeking out opportunities to learn more about the faith.

These are my hopes: hopes that hunger for God and his Christ may soon be passionately expressed and visibly enacted.

The thing is, I believe that God is in those hopes. So I believe that God will help us and lead us and guide us into realizing those hopes. I believe that as we rely on Jesus, as we more and more trust in the work of the Holy Spirit rather than in our own works, we will both acknowledge our hunger and find it satisfied, as we dine with our Lord Jesus Christ, who gives us his good eats.