

Sermon for Pentecost XII—Year B 2018  
*Are you hangry or hungry?*

Many of you have heard me say that my Dad was one of the kindest, most gentle, easygoing souls. What I haven't shared was that this was all true unless he was hungry and dinner was late. Then he was more like a "bear with a sore foot" as my mother used to say. These days my daughter just calls it being "*hangry*"—a mash up word of "hungry and angry." Perhaps you know what that's like? Either you've experienced it yourself or you have someone in your life who gets a bit *hangry* when they miss a meal or when a meal is delayed. As a recent commercial for Snickers candy bars put it: *You're not yourself when you're hungry.*

That pretty much sums up the condition of the Israelites in the wilderness—complaining and grumbling against Moses and Aaron, oh yes, and God—The whole congregation was definitely *hangry*.

We live as hungry people in a hungry world. Or perhaps I should say we live as a *hangry* people in a *hangry* world. Certainly everyone is looking for something that will sustain and nourish life, something that will feed and energize, something that will fill and satisfy. Everyone is looking for bread. The problem is not that we are hungry. It seems the problem is the *kind of bread* we eat. The bread we eat generally leaves us *hangry*.

Think about the varieties of bread  
being eaten in our lives and in the world today.  
Many of us eat the bread of violence and war.  
Many eat the bread of negativity, hostility, name-calling and lies.  
We eat the bread that objectifies and  
depersonalizes another human being.  
Some of us eat the bread of having to be right and get our way.  
Almost all of us eat the bread of hurt feelings and resentment.  
Sometimes we eat the bread of loneliness, fear, and isolation.  
There are times we eat the bread of sorrow or guilt.  
Sometimes we eat the bread of revenge or one-up-man-ship.  
You see we eat *all kinds* of bread.

But take note, the bread we eat  
reveals something about the nature of our appetites.  
No wonder so many of us are not just hungry, we're *hangry*.  
Remember, *you're not yourself when you're hungry*.

The world is full of bread,  
and yet far too many live hungry, empty, and searching.  
That, too, says something about our appetites  
and the bread we have eaten.  
Much of that bread is empty calories, junk or "fast" food.  
It's a sure sign that the bread we have eaten cannot give real life.  
It is perishable bread that nourishes only a perishable life.  
It leaves us empty,  
always only wanting more . . . and not in a good or salutary way.

Not all bread sustains and grows life.  
Not all bread is nutritious.  
If you want to know the nutritional value of the bread,  
you have to look beyond the bread.  
Where did it come from? What are its ingredients?

That's what Jesus is teaching in today's gospel lesson.

The people have shown up hungry.  
And it was just yesterday that Jesus fed well over 5,000 men,  
women, and children with five loaves and two fish.  
Today, the very next day,  
they show up and their first question is,  
“Rabbi, when did you come here?”  
They do not marvel at yesterday’s miracle.  
Nor do they give thanks for God’s generosity  
or even wonder who this “rabbi” is.  
It seems to me that they are mainly worried  
that they might have missed the next meal,  
or that Jesus started without them and they are too late.  
They saw no sign, no miracle,  
in the meal they shared just the day before.  
They saw nothing more than fish and bread.  
They either refused or were unable to see  
beyond the fish and bread.  
They are interested only in their own appetites  
and, what is more, Jesus knows it.

*Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me,  
not because you saw signs,  
but because you ate your fill of the loaves,*” Jesus says to them.  
The people are concerned only for their stomachs—  
their physical needs.  
But Jesus is concerned for their lives—their *whole* lives—  
the physical and the spiritual.  
The people want to feed themselves with bread.  
Jesus wants to feed them with God.  
*Do not work for the food that perishes,  
but for the food that endures for eternal life.*  
The people have taken in the bread  
but not the teaching, the holy words  
that are an integral part of the meal.

The food that endures is Jesus himself.  
He is the bread that is broken  
and given away for the life of the world.  
He is the bread that is broken and yet never divided.  
He is the bread that is eaten and yet never exhausted.  
He is the bread that consecrates those who believe the words:  
*“Take and eat. This is my body given for you.”*  
Jesus is the Word of God made flesh,  
given in the bread we share.

When we believe in Jesus, eating and taking him into our lives,  
we live differently.  
We see ourselves and one another  
as persons created in the image and likeness of God  
rather than as obstacles or issues to be overcome.  
We trust the silence of prayer  
rather than the words of argument.  
We choose love and forgiveness  
rather than anger and retribution.  
We choose intimacy and vulnerability  
rather than superficiality and defensiveness.  
We listen for God’s voice rather than our own.  
Ultimately, we seek life rather than death.

Yes, in all truth, we need real, good food—  
of the tangible and intangible kinds.  
This is not an either/or proposition.  
It is a both/and condition.  
I recall Mother Teresa once reporting that often when  
she would feed and care for the physical needs of the sick and poor  
in Calcutta, they would beg from her a “word from God.”  
These poor, sick people of Calcutta knew they needed both—  
bread (nourishment) for their bodies,  
*and* bread (nourishment) for their souls.

*I am the bread of life, Jesus says.  
Whoever comes to me will never be hungry,  
and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*  
Jesus offers the people his very self.  
*He is* the imperishable bread  
that nourishes and sustains imperishable life.

Jesus makes us the same offer.  
He offers himself *to us* in every one of our relationships:  
family, friends, strangers, enemies,  
those who agree with us, *and* those who disagree.  
It is not an either/or proposition  
but always a both/and proposal.  
No wonder we need the bread of life to meet the challenge!

In every situation and each day of our life  
we need to choose the bread we will eat:  
the perishable or imperishable.  
In so doing we also choose the life we want to live.

Remember, you're not yourself when you're hungry.

So I wonder, what bread will we eat today?  
Will we choose to be *hangry*  
or will we choose the bread of life?