

It's just past six on a Friday night. It's been a long week, and nobody feels like cooking. The family piles into the car, and after all the seatbelts have been clicked, someone (usually Mom or Dad) throws out the inevitable question: "So, what are we hungry for?"

It's a necessary question. After all, we live in a world where almost every major intersection offers a buffet of bountiful choices. "Will it be Mexican or Italian? Are you up for Sushi, down with Thai, or are you in the mood for something more all-American — say, a burger and fries?" Although our options at times appear to be endless, statistics tell us that much of the time we Americans will opt for something quick, easy, and light on the pocketbook. Yes, despite warnings about our health, and worries over such things as trans fats or gluten, what many of us still crave is good ol' fast food.

And why not? You can find it everywhere. Gone are the days when a hungry family had to search for a drive-through in order to be fed. Fast-food chains such as McDonald's and Burger King are now located a few feet from the checkout counter in Wal-Mart, just past the pump at many gas stations, and even in the cafeterias of several large hospitals.

In his best seller *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, Eric Schlosser notes that Americans spend more money on fast food than on higher education, computers, computer software, or new cars. In fact, according to Schlosser, we spend more on fast food than on movies, books, magazines, newspapers, and recorded music — combined. That's a lot of *Big Mac* sandwiches. Which begs the question, "*So, what are we hungry for?*"

It's a question that goes beyond what our body feeds on for fuel, beyond what we do to quench a midday craving. It's a question that — if we allow it to — can tug at our much deeper drives and desires, and it can lead us to ponder other thoughts such as: What accomplishment are you feasting on, hoping it will give

you that long-sought-after sense of fulfillment? What activity do you devour, holding out for the day that it finally makes you feel whole? What ideology are you buying into in bulk, praying that it will provide an answer to all of the mysteries of life? And although this reflective process could go on and on, let's try to narrow things down a bit.

What are we hungry for? It's an important question for us to try to answer, as we seek to discover the differences between the "foods" in life that often fail us, and the food from God, who promises never to leave us hungry. And it's a much-needed question because, in case you haven't noticed, we're living in a world that's craving something new to feast on, and something more fulfilling than the ordinary fare.....Some people believe that money, fame, or power will satisfy their needs or desires. Others look to the latest technology to tide them over. After all, life has to be better when we're able to watch *Dancing with the Stars* in 4k high definition, right?

Jesus, as you can probably imagine, was well acquainted with hungry people. In fact, the gospel of John paints a picture of Jesus who, at the height of his earthly ministry, had reached a sort of "rock-star" status in much of Palestine. His miracles amazed the masses, and his sermons could silence a crowd. The buzz about Jesus was that "this guy had the touch." "This guy was the real deal," they said. And so the people followed.

In our story this morning, Jesus and the disciples attempt to hang out on a hilltop, only to find a large crowd gathering, excited about the miracles they've seen. This was no small pack of fans. From all indications, it was a stadium full of people, lines of folks as far as the eye could see, making their way to Jesus. Thousands upon thousands were hungry for whatever it was that this rock-star rabbi would do next.

Sensing both a logistical nightmare, and the opportunity to send an unmistakable message, Jesus engaged in what would be his most magnificent miracle yet. Taking five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus said to the disciples, “Make the people sit down.” He grabbed the measly meal, gave thanks and then offered it to the masses. And to the surprise of all but the Savior himself, it lasted. That simple and insignificant little meal more than satisfied the hunger of thousands upon thousands of Jesus’ biggest fans.

Of course, when studying this story, it’s tempting to use it as an excuse to paint a very attractive, but dangerously inaccurate picture of Jesus. The temptation is to see Jesus — who can walk on water, heal the sick, raise the dead, and apparently calm not only the seas but also our *stomachs* — the same way that crowd did. The temptation is to see a Savior who’s here to simply meet our needs and make our temporal troubles melt away.

One can easily begin to see Jesus as a short-order Savior, here to quench all our earthly cravings. In fact, John tells us the people were so moved by the miracle that they wanted to throw a crown on Jesus and anoint him as their earthly king right there, on the spot! Perhaps they were thinking, “Hey, with this guy in power, life will be one nonstop buffet of blessings!”

And if we’re honest with ourselves, we’ll admit that many of us first approach Jesus with precisely the same attitude. Our lives are filled with cravings for things such as financial security, physical well-being, and peaceful relationships. We enlist the help of folks such as Dr. Phil or Dr. Oz, we try the secrets to satisfaction touted on magazine covers, and we devour the latest self-help books, hoping they will provide the healing we hunger for.

Even the way many of us shop for actual food offers a striking metaphor of our search for satisfaction. Warehouse stores such as Sam’s Club and Costco allow shoppers to load up on life’s necessities at bargain prices and in bulk, working on

the idea that life is better when you can buy more. And those stores offer deals on everything imaginable. If you log onto Costco online you'll discover that they even sell coffins— yes, coffins— to bargain-hungry customers. As a side note, this alone begs the question: What do you do with a casket once you buy it, presuming you won't need it for a while, and can you buy only one?

Similarly, many of us shop for fulfillment like we shop for our groceries. We walk through life loading our massive carts full of stuff that we hope will cure our cravings for the picture-perfect family, a nice retirement, and a long, healthy life. And at some point, after hearing rumors of His power and talk of His miracles, we make our way to Jesus. Just like everything else, we throw him into our carts, too, attempting — just like the hungry crowds of John's gospel — to anoint Jesus as the ultimate means to all our shallow, earthly ends. In the process, even Jesus becomes just another ingredient in a game we play, where the goal is simply to get what we want. It's a journey that, in the end, proves unfulfilling.

Bono, a member of the rock band U2, and a professed Christian, sums up our search for a temporal deliverance in these hit lyrics: *"I have climbed the highest mountains, I have run through the fields ... I have run, I have crawled, I have scaled these city walls. ... But I still haven't found what I'm looking for."* Thankfully, in today's story we learn that Jesus is what we are truly looking for. He came to be the food that we truly need.

John tells us that Jesus sensed the crowd's desire to throw him into their cart and anoint him as their miracle-working king. This forced him to retreat until the mob made its way home. What Jesus knew was that while the people marveled at his miracles, they misunderstood the message he was trying to teach them. Jesus didn't come to help people get what they want. No, he came to be what we want. He didn't come to be a sort of "short-order savior," to simply crank out whatever it

is that will satisfy our earthly needs. He came to be the food that we feast on. All of which begs the question once again: *What are we hungry for?*

If you're looking for a Jesus who will fatten your 401(k), guarantee a cure for your cancer, offer you "10 easy steps to a perfect family," land you a great job, or restore each and every one of your relationships, then you've got the wrong Jesus. There are plenty of Jesus' people who can help with such things, and indeed the Scriptures offer plenty of guidance on such things. But Jesus himself has different things to tend to.

Jesus didn't come to perfect our lives; he came to lay down his life and take it back up again, as he himself said. "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father." In fact, Jesus' death and resurrection, then, are a "meal" that sustains our souls, bringing wholeness, healing and growth. **When we come to Jesus, and for Jesus, we receive Jesus.**

When our souls are fed and filled by the work of Jesus, we may still go through seasons of illness, unemployment, or even a lack of food. But one thing we will never, ever be is — empty. Furthermore, when we fill ourselves with Jesus, we find that many of our other cravings in life, such as a need for purpose and meaning, become satisfied, freeing us to view the issues that affect our day-to-day lives with eyes of contentment and with an eternal perspective.

So, one last time: *What are we hungry for?* It's a great question. It's a question that goes beyond what we do to quench a midday craving. It's a question that — if we allow it — tugs at our much deeper drives and desires. May we feast on the Food that offers us true sustenance for our souls. May we follow Jesus not so that he can meet our needs, but rather knowing that he is all that we need! In the words of the prophet Isaiah : "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your

labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.” Amen. Thanks be to God.