

The Rev. Kerith Harding's Sermon January 29, 2017 -- Beatitudes

I have a theory that we all have one of three different states of mind in regards to hunger:

*Crazy hungry

*Angry hungry

*OR, so-scared-of-being-hungry-that-we'll-do-anything-to-avoid-it.

When I think of **Crazy hungry**, I think of a friend of ours who came to visit on vacation. She had been touring around the island and she came bursting into the house and said, "DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO EAT? LIKE PEANUT BUTTER?!?!" Ali said, "Well, technically, yes, we have peanut butter, but we call it 'dog peanut butter' because we use it to put in the dog's bones and we don't necessarily clean the knife after each use." Our friend said, "That's fine," and she grabbed a spoon and dug it into the dog peanut butter.

EEEEK!

That is crazy hungry.

And then there is **angry hungry**, otherwise known as - - "hangry." These are the people who when they are hungry, act angry. They may not even know that what they are really feeling is hunger, until they quench it, and then all of a sudden, they aren't angry any more. Hence, the term, hangry.

And then, finally, there are those who are so worried that they might get hungry, that they do everything to avoid it. [Self disclosure = that would be me.] When I get on a plane, I pack a lunch, a dinner, a breakfast, gummy bears, and Twizzlers. And then, when the flight attendants come around with those insanely expensive meals, I buy one of those, too, just in case... Yes... I have a deep fear of being hungry.

So -- three kinds of reactions to hunger (and there may be more):

crazy hungry,

angry hungry,

and afraid to be hungry.

Why am I talking about this? Well, because hunger is a theme in this morning's Gospel lesson.

The Beatitudes are perhaps one of the most well-known scripture passages. It's also one of the few places where Jesus makes us a list. And, when he does so, he goes up onto a mountain, echoing Moses going up on a mountain to proclaim the Ten Commandments. So, please, don't be tempted to think of the Beatitudes as just some beautiful words. Like the Ten Commandments, their meant to challenge us; to call us to action. And, if they aren't doing so, quite frankly, we are missing the point.

Yes, some of them seem a little counter-intuitive. "Blessed are you when people revile you or persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you on my account... Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you." But, you see, the beatitudes are meant to challenge the very way we move through the world, both as individuals in a community. Most of us move through the world *avoiding* persecution, *avoiding* conflict, *avoiding* hunger... And Jesus is saying --- NOPE --- that's not the point, people. GET HUNGRY. GET SPIT UPON. And if there is CONFLICT in your world, you most work tirelessly for PEACE, no matter the cost.

So, rather than reading, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled...", as if there is some mysterious "they" out there, read it like this: "**YOU!** Hunger and thirst for righteousness!"

What is righteousness, exactly? That's "the right conduct, that God requires." And, how do we know what God requires? Well, it's pretty much spelled out in scripture.

Consider this timely passage from Exodus: You shall not oppress the resident alien [i.e., the refugee] for you were aliens yourselves once, in the land of Egypt."

Consider all Jesus directives in the Gospels...Welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, be with the sick, visit those in prison. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

But there is something in all of us, which resists being quite *that* hungry. We're ok with being kind to our neighbor, but we don't want to be **dog-peanut-butter-eating-hungry**, not the kind of hungry that requires us to make true sacrifices for people we don't even know or to love smelly dirty people as ourselves. And we're ok with being with the sick, and praying for the sick, but not with being so **hangry** about it that we personally work to make sure that everyone has access to healthcare.

Folks, Jesus doesn't put any qualifiers on his calls to action.

So, St. John's, this is my call to you in 2017.

Don't be like me on the plane... Don't be afraid of hunger. Don't pack a lunch, a dinner, and a breakfast for a 6 hour flight and then buy a meal on the plane just to avoid being hungry. A little hunger will do us all good. And in fact, Jesus promises us, that those of us who truly hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled! It isn't instant gratification, but it will be worth it. Instead...

Get crazy hungry.

And if that means people start calling you "the crazy lady who hungers and thirsts for God's will", that's fine. We follow a Lord who many people thought was crazy. As C.S. Lewis said, he's either a liar. A lunatic. Or the Lord. You decide. But you can't choose LORD and then say you'd rather not endeavor to hunger and thirst for righteousness just because it's hard or might upset somebody. It doesn't work that way.

And - Get angry hungry. Let your *hangry* fuel change that will make a difference in the lives of millions.

Some of you may remember from history class the phrase "bread and circuses" – used to describe 1st century Romans who no longer cared to get

involved in their communities or take any meaningful action because they were fed and entertained. Being fed can be a curse. It can rob of us of our drive, our motivation, our will to change things.

Last night I watched as hundreds of protesters and senators descended on major US airports to protest the ban on Muslim travelers.

Hunger drove them there – in the cold and the dark, using subway lines and taxis and braving all kinds of inconvenience because they were hungry for doing the right thing.

They were hungry for justice.

They were hungry for others to have the same freedoms and opportunities they do.

They were hungry for families to be reunited.

They were hungry for Iraqi informants to find safety in the country whose soldiers they helped.

This is not the time to be afraid of being hungry, people. This is the time to be angry hungry and crazy hungry. Eating a dog food peanut butter sandwich will seem mild compared to what this kind of hunger can produce.

For each of us, this hunger will be different.

Each of us has some kind of gnawing, I would suspect, to do more, to act more, to do something.

Let that hunger grow.

And then go see where it takes you. My guess is that it will take you face to face with Jesus himself.

But you'll have to find that out for yourselves...

AMEN.