

Christ Our Anchor Presbyterian Church
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John 6: 35-40

SPIRITUAL HUNGER

In the great green room,
There was a telephone, and
A red balloon,
And a picture of the cow jumping over the moon.....

These are probably familiar words to many of you. You might even be able to finish the story. But, whether these words are familiar or not, we can easily envision the images; the color of a room, a phone (whether it's a I-13 or a landline), a balloon that happens to be red, and a picture hanging in a room. Here and now, things that are part of our everyday world.

These words are from the beloved children's book, "Good Night Moon," by Margaret Wise Brown. A recent article in The New Yorker magazine told that her writing for children was considered radical. She wrote in the 1930s and 40s, a time when most children's books in America drew from the classic tales of Hans Christian Anderson and Beatrix Potter. Brown didn't find fault with this type of literature, but she claimed that when children are first exposed to reading, they are most engaged with things that are familiar to their world: tables, chairs, cats, dogs, telephones, things in their rooms, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. She claimed that young children are most engaged initially when stories are anchored in what is very familiar to them.

Brown worked as a teacher at an experimental school in New York City called Bank Street. She would read her manuscripts to young children to see their reactions, and she would change her writing accordingly. She found illustrators whose work reminded her of modernist paintings because she wanted bold colors in her books.

She became involved in what was known as the Fairy Tale War. Her books were rejected from the shelves of the New York City Public Library because other educators argued that children needed plots, lessons learned and that every story should have a moral.

Brown wrote "Good Night Moon" in 1947, and died an early death in 1952 at the age of 41, never to fathom that by the next century sales of "Good Night Moon" would reach 40 million copies.

She never lost her zeal for her argument of "Here and Now" as a start to a child's engagement to the world of reading; objects that were familiar, the everyday, things that brought them security in a world that could be scary, and hard to understand.

“Good night comb!
Good night brush!
Good night stars!
Good night air!
Good night noises everywhere!

The Here and Now! The Every Day!

Like for us.....

Coats, Hats, Scarves, Toothbrushes, Cars, Breakfast, Coffee, Juice,
Water, Bread.....

BREAD!

We know that Jesus’ conversations, teachings, and parables are not always that straight forward and easy to understand.

So, how Interesting that in the Gospel of John, Jesus finishes many, “I am...” statements with words that would have been everyday words to those in the ancient near eastern culture.

Light: I am the **light** of the world
Water: I am the living **water**.
Shepherd: I am the **good shepherd**.
Gate: I am the **sheep gate**.
Bread: I am the **bread of life**.

Many are still common symbols of our everyday experience. We may not be young children in years, but how appreciative we are, when we are handed something that we can easily envision, something part of the here and now, the everyday. It is Jesus’ way of helping us understand his identity by engaging with things that are familiar.

In our New Testament passage this morning, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life,” not the bread baked at Grauls or the in our ovens at home.

But bread that feeds us spiritually.

“Okay, Jesus.... but it’s a little hard for me to roll down my window at a stop light and engage a person who is asking for lunch money by saying “Jesus is the bread of life.”

We may speak about feasting and abundance in religious terms, but we live in a world where many just can't comprehend literal feasting and abundance of anything, and the words, "Jesus is the bread of life" wouldn't fill a hungry person's stomach.

So, we need to be clear that God and Jesus care about physical hunger. People's bodies need food!

Remember that when the Israelites were wandering for forty years in the wilderness and food became so scarce, God sent manna from heaven to fill their bellies.

And earlier in chapter 6 of John's Gospel, the disciples panicked because the crowd was so large and soon, they were going to be a hungry crowd. There was no choice but to send them away, but Jesus didn't. He fed them with five loaves of bread and two fishes. Their bellies were full. There were even leftovers.

God cares and has always cared about physical hunger. Today, God cares that 10.7 percent of the world's population is food insecure. God cares that 69,000 residents in Anne Arundel County, 26 % of those below the age of 18 are food insecure.

God does not brush to the side physical hunger to jump into metaphors.

Before Jesus said "I am the bread of life," he fed people with loaves and fishes.

And perhaps it was because the physical need had been satisfied, he could speak about spiritual hunger. Bodies need food! So do spirits!

Many of the people to whom Jesus is speaking in our passage are those he has just fed.

What he says to them is, "Yes, you are no longer physically hungry because you ate the bread and the fishes. But, in a few hours, you will be hungry again."

Who I am is not the bread that you continually need for physical nourishment, but the bread that you need to sustain life, the bread that is always with you, accessible and available here and now, but just for here and now... for eternity.

What we need for living is available in Jesus, and to convey this gift, Jesus uses images that are part of our everyday.

Jesus knows physical hunger.

Jesus also knows spiritual hunger, and that someone could be very secure in the fact that every day, they will get breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and yet be **starving spiritually**.

We go through these spiritually hungry times where we just can't seem to connect with God. All the things that may have excited us about our faith are leaving us lukewarm. We start to lay blame on others who we think are the cause of this feeling and unrest. There's an inner dullness, and we just want something that is going to bring back those spiritual goose bumps. We start to wonder about God and all that we were passionate about.

We don't always feel spiritually fulfilled because as humans we yearn, we search, we doubt. We find ourselves spiritually hungry.

We lose confidence in our worthiness. The tapes that play in our minds seem relentless, telling us that we are not enough, that we should be better, we need to do more and work harder and faster. We can't hear ourselves being called "Beloved!"

In trying to get his message across that day, Jesus said to the crowd that day, "Hey, you see me. Here I am! Right in front of you! You see me, but you really don't believe that I can give you all that you need, the bread of life here and through eternity. That's big! Yes! But you don't quite believe. This is what I came for- to show you all of God's good intentions for you and the world, which are as available and accessible to you as the bread you butter."

We all know the phrase, "Seeing is believing!" and we are certainly good at demanding that. "Show me!"

But in the Gospel of John that theme gets turned on its head. We can only see clearly when we believe. It's believing that helps us to see. That's faith, and we have a lifetime to grow in our faith.

We can believe that no matter what, Jesus is in the here and now, wherever life takes us.

When we are spiritually hungry, Jesus says "Don't throw in the towel." As our Psalm said this morning, "Be confident that there is always an angel of God encamped by your side, the tent is pitched, the fire is stoked, and the bread is broken and given to you to nourish you with life.

When we come to communion, there is it, the here and now, the everyday: BREAD, A CUP!

The contemporary composer of Christian music, Rory Cooney wrote a song with the words:

The bread is spirit, a gift of our maker's love,
And we who share it know that we can be one,
As a living sign of God in Christ.

....bringing hope, sharing grace, demanding truth, speaking love.

For Jesus said, "I am the bread of life."
Taken and blessed, broken and shared.....

That the world might live.

What could be more Here and Now?

What could be more Every day?

Than.....

LIFE!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

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