

Questioning Our Values
“Reviewing Our Hungers”
Luke 6:20-26

Dr. J. Howard Olds
March 11, 2007

There is an old parable about a seeker who sought out a mentor for spiritual advice. The mentor welcomed the seeker and proceeded to pour the visitor a cup of coffee. When the cup overflowed, the mentor kept pouring. When the saucer spilled over, the mentor kept pouring. When the hot drink started stinging the seekers fingers, he complained loudly, “What are you doing?” The mentor calmly replied, “Teaching you a lesson. You come to me seeking spiritual fulfillment, but you are already full. There is simply no room for anything else. Go home and empty yourself. Then come back with a heart that has room for God.”

Jesus said: *“Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Woe to you who are well fed now for you will go hungry.”* What was our Lord trying to teach us? Let me form the sermon in two questions.

WHAT ARE WE FULL OF?

I know that is poor English, but it is real life! Woe to you who are full now, for you will go hungry. We are full of OURSELVES, our thoughts, our needs, our desires, our fantasies.

The evolution of magazine titles over my lifetime tells the story. In college, I read LIFE magazine. Then came LOOK; later PEOPLE magazine came into being. Then along came US. Surfing the internet for this sermon, I discovered a magazine entitled SELF, where this month you can find new fixes for your stubborn fat, bring sexy back into your relationship, and learn how to be happier in five minutes.

When I posed this question on our new blog site, one anonymous person made this entry. “I am embarrassed to say it, but I am full of myself, my needs, my feelings, my desires.” Hundreds of us could say that.

Jesus had a better idea. He says it well in Luke 9:23, *“If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves, and take up their cross daily, and follow me.”*

Life is not about us. To think otherwise is to be full of it.

We are full of our WORRIES. There are things to worry about. No society in the history of the world has ever enjoyed the standard of living that Americans know today. Yet, since 1960 the divorce rate has doubled, teen suicide has tripled, violent

crime has quadrupled, and incidences of depression are ten times what they were one hundred years ago.

Meanwhile, our enlightened society tells us the sun will cause cancer, but cloudy days tend to make us depressed. One day we are informed that it's unhealthy to drink coffee, and shortly thereafter, different studies reveal coffee to be good for us. I've yet to travel on an airplane without shuddering a bit when the pilot announces we are about to make our final descent.

Jesus posed a probing question. *"Who of you by worrying about it can add a single hour to his life?"* So be not anxious about tomorrow for it will be trouble free? No, each day has enough trouble of its own. Take it from me, life is not all up to you. Accept your mortality. Live a life that is free.

We are full of our RESPONSIBILITIES. We've got things to do, places to go, jobs to complete, money to make, and families to raise.

Bonnie Miller-McLemore is a wife, mother, author, and Vanderbilt Divinity Professor. She has a new book entitled, *In the Midst of the Chaos: Caring for Children as Spiritual Practice*. In it, Bonnie says most of us think we have to get away to some monastery, retreat center, or anywhere but where we happen to be to find God. But like Brother Andrew of old, Bonnie finds God in the routines of the day, the hello's and goodbye's, the baths and the stories, the chores and the laundry. Can we do that?

I have come to this conclusion about life. All your emails will not be answered when you die, so get over it.

The Apostle Peter had it right when he wrote, *"Cast all your cares on Christ, because he cares for you"* (I Peter 5:7). Learn to pray without ceasing by making prayer the essence of everything you do. Seize the moment with the constant assurance that you have the gift of eternal life.

WHAT ARE WE HUNGRY FOR?

"Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied."

Matthew said, *"Blessed are those who hunger for RIGHTEOUSNESS for they will be filled."* A friend of mine challenged me on this point by commenting that he didn't have much appetite for righteousness since he didn't even know what it meant. I replied, "Righteousness is like country ham, fine wine, or Krystal hamburgers. You have to develop a taste for it."

Righteousness is a passion for the right, the good, the worthy. It is doing all the good you can, in every way you can, for as long as you can. Righteousness is more than

keeping the rules; it is a stand for justice, a search for truth, a life of love.

I have been reading the story of Jim Lawson, John Lewis, Diane Nash, C. T. Vivian, Bernard Lafayette, Jim Bevel, Rodney Powell, and Gloria Johnson, all college students who led the Civil Rights sit-in's in Nashville which integrated department store lunch counters. I've been moved by their determination to take their cause for freedom on bus rides through Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia at great risk to themselves and their families. This is what righteousness is about. The righteous are those willing to stand for the right with all their might no matter the cost.

One of my critics e-mailed me recently asking, "Where have all the prophets gone?" "Where are the Martin Luther King's of the 21st century?" It's a question worthy of our consideration.

Have you a passion for the poor? What about single mom's and neglected children? What about people suffering from AIDS? What about the issue of immigration in Nashville? What is right? Who will rise above political pronouncements and appeal to the consciences of civil people? Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Are you hungry for a MEANINGFUL LIFE?

Another blogger wrote me this week saying, "I hunger to do something meaningful for the glory of God!" Life is not a matter of finding something to live on, but something to live for. People in Africa today are dying for lack of food. People in America today are dying for lack of purpose. We've not discovered a reason to be born, save to consume the corn, eat the fish, and leave behind a dirty dish. Such a mission leaves us miserable.

Actor Woody Harrelson said not long ago, "I've been nursing an emptiness far too long. I made a huge mistake by turning my back on religion, because I lost my soul in the process. Now, I am beginning to find a bright new reason for being."

Somebody sitting in one of these pews today is saying, "There's got to be more to life than this." I want to say, "There is."

Are you hungry for a PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

Is there a thirst that the things of earth cannot quench? Is there a hunger that is left unmet when the world has given you everything you've ever hoped for? Such thirst and hunger is from God. Don't try to satisfy it with anything less. Here are four things that will help you develop a personal relationship with God:

Feel the Hunger – Don't disguise it. Don't ignore it. Let it rise and make you restless.

Psalm 42:1 says, “*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*”

Get Acquainted – Read the Bible. Participate in worship. Find a small group. Know that your search for God is nothing compared with God’s search for you. Like a good shepherd, God plunges through the briar patches and the bars to find his own. He comes out into the darkness pleading with self-righteous brothers to join the party. God is seeking for you.

Make the Leap of Faith – I can’t prove that God exists. You can’t prove that He doesn’t. When it has all been said and done, I’d rather take my stand on the promise of Christ, than depend on the polemics of cynics. So I join with that father in the New Testament who exclaims, “*I believe, Lord, help my unbelief.*”

Live the Life– Let the Holy Spirit help you become what you were created to be. May the Spirit of the Living fall afresh on you and me until we take on the values of Jesus and the lifestyle of a disciple.

Blessed are those who hunger now, for they will be satisfied. That is God’s promise to you. God never promises what he cannot fulfill.