**Sermon for Sunday August 2nd**

Recently a word that was first coined in the 1950’s has made a resurgence; I think it was a Snickers candy bar ad that seized on it, the word is “Hangry”. A combination of “hungry” and “angry” and it is that feeling you get when you are hungry and everything irritates you. It’s actually a great word and one that I can certainly relate to as I get “hangry” quite quickly.

When I was a kid I had a nickname. It was more than a nickname really, as everyone, except my mother and my sister, used it *all of the time*. I used to sign school papers with it. If I haven’t told you in conversation you’ll never guess it. Until I was about 20 years old I was known as “Phattie”. In was never an insult or even a slight. Fact is my whole life I have tended to be too thin. I’ve never had much of an appetite and I think I have a fast metabolism. In any event I was known to get “hangry” so my family coined a phrase they’d say “Feed the Phat” whenever I was getting a little short with people. My siblings and childhood friends still call me Phattie and when I get snarky I’ll still occasionally hear would someone “feed Phattie”.

When you are hungry nothing matters more than food. This is a universal truth. Anthropologists look to a culture developing the arts, poetry or visual art, as a sign of wealth because both require a full stomach. It is when a society has a reliable source of food that they can turn their minds to what we call “loftier” pursuits such as art.

God made us and knows full well that what we need before all else are the basics of life. We need to eat.

Isaiah wrote in this morning’s reading “Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!”

Today we also read from Psalm 145 which says, “The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.
The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.
You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.”

And in our gospel we read the story of the “Feeding of the Five Thousand”.

Food first! This is an important reminder. Lofty thoughts and theology are all good and well. High morals and a code of conduct based on love are important. But if you love someone feed them. This is the first take away from today’s readings and it is an important one. As we settle back into gathered worship this September we will once again hear about our parish role in the Durham Anti-Poverty Coalition and our local food bank. As we do let’s keep today’s readings in mind.

As we seek to reach out to our community in Christian love let’s remember that its food first. Anyone who is hungry will tell you: “Feed me then tell me that you love me. Feed me then tell me that God loves me. Feed me then talk matters of faith and hope but for the love of God, feed me first.”

Now, if you’ll permit me I’d like to shift gears. I want to talk briefly about two prayers Jesus made in today’s gospel; one we read about and one I imagined.

I’ve mentioned in the past that I try to bring my imagination to the reading of scripture. I like to picture the scenes and fill in details. Today’s reading began, “Now when Jesus heard that (John the Baptist) had been killed by Herod, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself.”

I imagine that the news of John’s execution hit Jesus hard. There would have been the obvious sadness at the loss of his cousin and fellow prophet. I also imagine he was scared for himself. How could he fail to wonder if he wasn’t next? In any event he had to get away so he got in the boat alone and put out into the lake. As he arrived at the other shore there was a huge crowd waiting for him. This is where I imagine Jesus prayed something very much like “God, I really just want to be alone, please empower me to love these folk. Give me the strength, Lord, to tend to these people.”

In my mind I think Jesus said a prayer quite like this because it’s the sort of thing regular people of faith do and for whatever else he was Jesus was a regular person of faith. How many of you have issued this type of prayer? “Lord, I do not want to attend this social function, give me the grace to be friendly.” Or “Lord, I’m not sure I can teach this class or deliver this talk, give me the strength.”

So, given why Jesus got into that boat that morning I’m pretty sure he prayed for God’s strength as he got out of it and waded into that crowd, for whom we are told “he had compassion.” *Another lovely thought*. And his prayer was answered. Jesus preached and healed we are told until the evening.

The second prayer, the one we actually read about, came when Jesus needed five loaves and two fish turned into supper for five thousand people. Matthew says simply that, “Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.”

Jesus prayed. I think it’s useful to remember that Jesus didn’t turn a little food into a lot of food, God the Father did. As was true of all of his miracles, Jesus asked his heavenly Father for what was needed and God did the work, God provided.

Like the prayer I imagine Jesus made for the strength he was going to need that day, this prayer over the food was answered. First, Jesus was given the strength to get out of that boat, then he was provided with enough food to feed thousands of hungry people.

Why were both of these prayers answered in the affirmative? You might want to respond, “Well the prayers were answered in the affirmative because it was Jesus.” Except we know, don’t we, that not all of Jesus’ prayers were answered as he wanted. In the garden of Gethsemane the night he was arrested he prayed, “Father, if you are willing remove this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done.” I don’t know about you but I hear a scared man praying not to die. This prayer was answered but not in the way that Jesus wanted when he said it.

Back to today’s story, I am convinced that Jesus’ prayers were answered that day because he asked for that which he could pass on to others. The food was for the crowd and so was the internal fortitude he needed to collect himself to get out of the boat that morning.

Now, let me say here, there is absolutely nothing wrong with praying for our own wants and needs. In fact we are encouraged to do so. All I want to observe this morning is that Jesus prayed for what he required in order to serve others and in both cases his prayers were answered. This observation brought to my mind a wonderful image that Richard Rohr uses to explain the Holy Trinity.

Richard says the three persons of the trinity are like the rotating blades or buckets on a water wheel. Each being filled completely so that it can in turn empty itself completely into the next one, so that it can be refilled again to do the same again. A continuous filling up in order to empty self into the other. Receive and empty into the next. According to this analogy we, as Christians, are invited to become buckets in the same water wheel; we can be filled by God in order that we might then empty ourselves into others, giving completely so that we might again be filled.

Isn’t this just a beautiful image of love and relationship?!

This is how Jesus allowed himself to be used in the feeding story we read this morning. This, I believe is why his prayers were answered in the affirmative. In both cases he was saying Father please fill me up so that I might empty myself into others. Bless me that I might bless them.

What is the implication for us? Well, as always, I believe we are expected to bloom where we’re planted. By this I mean we need only look around us to find opportunities to serve because around us, in our lives, are people with needs we can meet. Rather, I should say there are people around us with needs we can meet with God’s help.

I encourage you to pray for eyes and hearts to see the needs around you. As these needs become apparent then do what Jesus did the day of the “Feeding of the Five Thousand”; ask God to provide you whatever you require to meet the needs as of others as you see them.

Be open to having yourself filled up so that you can pour into the other. This might look like noticing someone that is lonely and needs a visit, so ask for the time and patience to visit them. This might be hearing your church’s call for volunteers and praying for a way that you can respond. And, as is so often the case, this might be that most basic of human needs, you might notice, like Jesus did that day, that someone around you is hungry. Amen