

HUNGER FOR GOOD

WORLD HUNGER

SERMON NOTES

TEXT: Matthew 5:6; Luke 6:21a, 25a; Psalm 107

RESOURCE: Confessing the Beatitudes by Margaret Aymer

THEME: The desperate hunger of the poor for bread must awaken in me a corresponding hunger for justice.

SUMMARY: In the beatitudes Jesus recognizes the realities of hunger, both for bread and for justice, and promises that those who are famished will be satisfied. But Jesus also rebukes those who are overfed in the face of the suffering of others. Jesus's rebuke is intended to arouse in me a deep hunger for justice, in its many dimensions, that leads to food security and the flourishing of all creation. There is comfort to be found in the divine promise that our hunger, both for bread and for justice, will be satisfied.

COMMENTS ON THE TEXT AND SOME HOMILETIC MOVES:

The beatitudes of Jesus appear in two of the synoptic gospels: in Matthew 5, in what is known as the Sermon on the Mount, and in Luke 6, in what is sometimes referred to as the Sermon on the Plain. There are both similarities and differences in the rendering of these sermons in the two gospels. Reading them together and observing their nuances leads to some important insights for a World Hunger sermon.

Let's begin with Jesus's teaching in Luke 6:20 ff. Here Jesus announces a blessing on those who are poor for they will inherit the kingdom of God, followed immediately by a blessing word for those who are hungry for they will be filled.

It is no accident that Jesus addresses the poor and the hungry, for they are often the same people. The hungry are often hungry simply because they are poor and lack the economic resources to provide for themselves. The indignity of poverty brings with it the pain of hunger.

LUKE 6

VOCABULARY TO KNOW

Hunger: Jesus uses the highly descriptive word *peinontes*, which speaks not of a mild hunger that is easily satisfied, like the peckishness that we might feel on the drive home from work that causes us to pull into a fast food joint. No, *peinontes* refers to the chronic, persistent, life- and health-threatening hunger that is the daily experience of the desperately poor. It describes the perilous experience of those who endure famine, food insecurity, malnourishment and deprivation.

In Jesus' day, hunger was part of the widespread and daily agony of the multitudes living under Roman rule. As Rome grew, more and more food was demanded from the outlying colonies and what was



HUNGER FOR GOOD

WORLD HUNGER

SERMON NOTES

produced was reserved for the affluent and powerful. Economic policies and distribution practices meant that the poor were perpetually deprived of adequate nutrition; not only that but their needs were not considered important by the empire they served.

Blessing: Jesus promises that the hungry will be *makarios*, blessed, honored, exalted, raised up. And their blessing will consist in this: they will be filled (*chortazo*). Their condition will be reversed. Their place in the economic pecking order will be upended. Their alienating poverty will be displaced by their participation in the Kingdom of God and their craving hunger for food will be satisfied. This is the good news Jesus said he had been anointed to proclaim in Luke 4:18. This is the reversal his mother Mary sang about in Luke 1:53. The scarcity of the poor will be overcome by the abundant providence of God. For more on that rich theme consult *Walter Brueggemann*: <https://www.religion-online.org/article/the-liturgy-of-abundance-the-myth-of-scarcity/>.

Being Filled: The word *chortazo*, referenced above, is a verb that means, 'to feed' and derives from the word that means 'to pasture' or to 'tend like a shepherd'. This of course evokes reminders that 'The Lord is my shepherd who leads me by still waters and into green pastures.' By promising that the famished will be fed to satisfaction by the gentle shepherd Jesus renews the ancient promise to his hungry and oppressed audience.

THE TWIST

Just a few verses after Jesus' words of blessing for the hungry come words of warning. 'Woe', he says, 'to you who are well fed now for you will go hungry'. This may seem confusing, as if Jesus is saying the empty will become full and the full will be empty. If that were the case, where is the blessing in being *chortazo*?

But, importantly, Jesus uses the word *empimplemi*, which means "to be stuffed, to be gorged." The warning is addressed to those who have eaten to excess and gotten fat without sharing their obvious plenty with the poor. (For an Old Testament anticipation of this stark warning check out Isaiah 5:8ff.)

In Luke, Jesus is making a connection between the hunger of the poor and the indifference and excessive consumption of the wealthy. There is a blessing for one and a threat to the other. That's not a comfortable teaching for many of us to hear, because we might well recognize ourselves among the stuffed ones, the overfed.

MODERN FACTS & QUOTES TO CONSIDER

- One out of every six people on earth lives on less than \$1/ day while military spending worldwide is nearly \$1800 BILLION. Just one day's worth of military spending would provide the entire revenue required by UNICEF to bring supplies and services to vulnerable children around the world.
- 11,000 children perish every day from preventable causes, all of them linked to poverty.

HUNGER FOR GOOD

WORLD HUNGER

SERMON NOTES

- Over \$1800 BILLION is spent on luxury items around the world. And that is in addition to the 153 billion spent on toys and 683 billion spent on booze (data taken from *Globalization, Spirituality and Justice* by Daniel Groody).
- As Abraham Heschel has said, commenting on the prophet Isaiah, "It is not enough that we appreciate the virtue of generosity or even of justice, but we must also be confronted with the enormity, the monstrosity of the injustice."

It is difficult to get one's head around such numbers – they are staggering and they are outside of our ordinary experience. Yet it is necessary to hear them and to at least try to understand that poverty and hunger are a *profound* problem and present an enormous challenge. Not only that but they are an affront to God who created the world good and whose intention from the beginning has been that every man, woman, and child should flourish in the good creation.

The question that arises naturally from what has so far been said is 'what are we supposed to do? What does this mean for us, especially those of us who do not experience hunger?'

MATTHEW 5

In Matthew, Jesus does not address those who are hungry only for bread but who are hungry for justice. These are not different people, mind you, but these are the ones whose hunger for bread is experienced as injustice, as inequality, as an offense to them and an affront to God. This makes them crave justice. So Jesus' blessing word in Matthew is addressed to those hungry for bread and those hungry for an end to hunger, the ones hungry for justice. In Jesus pairing hunger with injustice, he gives answers and an action plan for the questions provoked in Luke 6.

VOCABULARY TO KNOW

Justice: Most English translations of the New Testament render Matthew 5:6 as 'blessed are those who hunger for righteousness' but the Greek word 'dikaiosyne' is more accurately translated as 'justice', which it surely meant in Jesus's day. Using the word 'justice' instead of righteousness changes the thrust of the passage – Jesus is not speaking of those who long to be 'right with God' as important as that is – but he is speaking of those who long for all relationships to be restored. In fact that is a pretty good shorthand definition of biblical justice – right relationships restored with God, with others, with the creation and with the self.

THE TWIST

God shares in a hunger for justice. Over and over scripture reminds us that God loves justice (Psalm 11:7); that it is foundational to God's reign (Psalm 89) and basic to God's own character. If one loves God, then one must also love the kind of justice that God loves: the kind that renews, restores, heals, defends the widow and orphan, and seeks shalom.

HUNGER FOR GOOD

WORLD HUNGER

SERMON NOTES

Jesus promises that those who hunger for justice will be satisfied. We must trust that this promise will be fulfilled by the God who loves justice, but we may also expect this fulfillment to be inextricably linked to our obedient response to the summons to DO JUSTICE (Isaiah 1:17, Micah 6:8).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Thinking about the real hunger of the poorest of the poor must make us long for justice in its various expressions.

- We hunger for economic justice because so much poverty and hunger is a consequence of economic policies and practices that are designed to serve the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor and marginalized.
- We hunger for climate justice because changes in the earth's atmosphere lead to drought, intensive weather events, flooding, erosion, irregular weather patterns that can lead to food shortages and exacerbates other challenges faced by the poor.
- We hunger for gender justice because women and girls suffer the worst effects of poverty.
- We hunger for racial justice because minorities often bear the brunt of food insecurity and the limiting effects of poverty.

CHALLENGE:

What words will I issue to my particular congregation to convict and encourage us to DO JUSTICE?
What must that look like when applied to the particularity of our community and neighbo(u)rs?

For sermon examples from a global context, more about how World Renew is serving God by serving our hungry neighbo(u)rs, and to find out how your congregation can help, please review the World Hunger devotional content online by visiting worldrenew.net/WorldHungerChurches or worldrenew.ca/WorldHungerChurches

