

Longing

February 28, 2016

Psalm 63

Do you long for anything? Imagine this situation.

You are in a store. The clerk asks, “May I help you find anything?” What is your most likely response?

My most likely response is, “No, thank you. I’m fine.” That’s true even if I have spent the last twenty minutes looking for a package of small, unbleached coffee filters (which should really be next to the coffee makers—but, of course, they’re not). That’s true even if I’m desperate to find those coffee filters because we have run out at home. That’s true even if I’m late for supper and faint with hunger.

Eventually I will ask for help. But I won’t like it.

Do you long for anything? We had to admit it. Longing means we have needs. It means we are incomplete, or even inadequate. It means we are dependent. Worst of all, it means we are vulnerable. And, wow, do we hate that!

Every day, the Holy Spirit comes along and asks, “May I help you find anything? For example, God?” Our most likely response is, “No, thank you. I’m fine.”

We don’t want to long for anything or anyone. So it is next to impossible for us to appreciate Psalm sixty-three. Psalm sixty-three is all about longing—longing for God. “*O God, you are my God,*” sings the psalmist. “*My soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you...*”

The Psalmist knows that empty space in our guts that only God can fill. The Psalmist longs for God. Maybe we can learn something here.

Our youngest son, Michael, loves dessert. Brenda tells this story of when Michael was small. He had not finished his supper with a clean plate. But Michael still wanted dessert. His mother said, “If you are too full to finish your supper, then you can’t have any room for dessert.”

Michael was undeterred. “But Mom,” he protested, “my dessert space is still empty!” Who can argue with that logic?

Keep in mind that image of the dessert space in your life.

Do you long for anything? We are created to long for God. It’s how we’re made. We have a space inside that only God can fill. Seventeen centuries ago, Saint Augustine of Hippo said, “Our hearts, O God, are restless until they rest in you.” No matter how much we try other things, our God space will remain empty. We have a space inside that only God can fill.

We are made to long for God. But real longing scares us. Hunger and thirst fill us with fear of scarcity. Leaking bank accounts keep us awake at night. Blank spaces on the calendar feel like laziness. Silence sounds like stupidity. Longing produces anxiety. It feels like emptiness.

And emptiness feels like death.

I was reminded this week of a Swahili word that might help here. The Swahili word, “Maafa,” means a deep, lingering wound. It is the wound we all suffer in our separation from God. It is the wound that expresses itself in our longings that cannot be filled. Maafa is, in part, the wound we suffer when our God space remains empty.

So we spend every ounce of energy working to feel full. We use almost anything to fill the vacuum—food, money, power, sex, work, sports, control, and security. But none of that will help. Our God space is still empty.

We are made to long for God. And God longs to fill us. That’s the good news! The psalmist sings for joy and invites us to learn the song. “*Because your steadfast love is better than life,*” the Psalmist exults. Better than life! Do you know anything in your life that is better than life? If not, the Psalmist has some news for you.

We believe that God gets emptied out so we can be filled. In Philippians, chapter two, we sing another song. We sing that Jesus emptied himself and became obedient to death on a cross. God did that to crack open our God-spaces so we can be filled. Jesus did that so our emptiness won’t feel like death any more. The Holy Spirit pours in through those cracks and fills us as only God can.

Do you long for anything? Underneath it all, we long for God. All our longings, all our desires, all our hungers are sign posts that point to our real hunger. When God fills us, we can be satisfied. “*My soul is satisfied with a rich feast,*” the Psalmist sings. In the footnote we read that this is a feast of fat and fatness. The psalmist finds God to be lip-smacking good. God wants to satisfy you and me in the same way.

Healing happens when we act on our deep longing and come to Jesus to be filled. That’s why we share Holy Communion each week. Do you long for anything? Jesus comes to fill us with his healing power, with the peace of his Holy Spirit. So come to the table today, expecting to meet Jesus. Come to the table today longing to have your God space filled with the Lord’s loving power.

And go forth knowing that the Holy Spirit wants to fill your God space each day. You might try a new prayer practice this week. Hold out your hands, palms down. Now, let’s pray. Dearest God, help me to release all those things that I use to substitute for you. Let me drop the fear and anger, the doubt and despair that fill me with darkness. As my hands are open and empty, I come to you to be filled.

Now, turn your hands palms up. And pray again. Dearest God, now that I am ready, fill me with your Word and Wisdom, your love and life, your healing and hope. I offer my God-space to you. Fill me, Lord, and then use me to help you fill other people in my life.

Do you long for anything? My prayer is that you long for God to fill you every day. Let's pray...

Pastor Lowell Hennigs