

Seeking Satisfaction

Exodus 17:1-7

Romans 5:1-11

John 4:5-42

Psalm 95

Imagine, if you will, that I have an empty eight-ounce glass and a full 32-ounce pitcher of water. Now imagine that I pour water from the pitcher into the glass until it reaches the very top. Would you call that glass full? Now imagine that I believe I need more than a mere eight ounces, so I proceed to pour more water into the glass. After pouring 16 ounces from the pitcher into the glass, is that glass any fuller than it was after I had poured the initial eight ounces? No. Full is full. We know that is true of a glass's capacity, but when it comes to the human quest for fullness, our brains and practice don't always align. Our appetites can be insatiable. Not because we do not have everything we need to be full, to feel fullness, but because we fear feeling lack.

Christianity has a word for the type of internal grasping that happens when our fear of not having enough causes us to reach for more than we need. It's called gluttony. We typically think of gluttony as overconsumption of food, but it applies to everything. Gluttony is any excessive or selfish overindulgence. Gluttony is almost inseparable from addiction because their roots are often the same. Fear. Both gluttony and addiction are so worried about not having enough, not feeling satisfied, that we refuse to trust God's provision and become determined to satisfy ourselves. The unfortunate consequence is that gluttony and addiction focus so much on what we fear lacking that they make us unable to feel satisfaction. Our glass may be completely full, but we keep pouring more in, losing out on the blessing of feeling what is already true, wearing ourselves out with desperation. We all do it. We numb ourselves to avoid pain and consequently numb ourselves from blessing. For some of us it is food, for others it's entertainment, or substances, or shopping, or learning, or achieving. Some of us do it through excessive immoderation while others do it

through excessive moderation. Regardless of our tendencies, most of us find ourselves, at some point, determined to provide for ourselves in ways that numb our ability to feel, tricking us into believing fullness is unavailable.

Our problem is not our appetite. Our desire is actually a good thing! It is the body's way of indicating a need. Religion has long been concerned with human desire, and the consequence is that we have been taught to silence our appetites. If you're craving the wrong food, diet. If you're tempted to drink or smoke too much or the wrong thing, then "just say no". And for heaven's sake, avoid sex! But the problem is not feeling the desire. The desire is an essential diagnostic helping us understand what we need. We cannot unilaterally trust every impulse because we live in a broken world and often crave things that will never satisfy. But those cravings indicate something valuable. The solution is not simply shutting them down. The solution is trusting God enough to allow ourselves to feel our desires so that we can learn to identify from them, what we need. Once we do that, we can start learning how to experience legitimate satisfaction.

The word satisfaction comes from the Latin *satis* (sah-tiss), which means enough. To be satisfied is to recognize the feeling of enough-ness. How many of us sit down to a good meal and then ruin the rest of the night by eating an extra portion? Overindulgence is the enemy of satisfaction. We can have too much of a thing and still not feel as if we have enough. Have you ever noticed that the happiest people in the world are often the people who have the least? If we want to experience the blessing of satisfaction, we can't just stop being gluttons. We must first learn to identify our desire, apart from our fear, so we can recognize what enough feels like.

Our lives are this sacramental location where the spiritual and the physical meet. Our bodies are an altar. It is no accident that Jesus uses bread and wine, physical food and drink from physical body and blood to describe the place where our deepest desires and greatest satisfaction come together. Fullness would be obsolete apart from craving. If we

want the world to believe in the goodness of God, we must be brave enough to trust it for ourselves first.

Today's story from the Exodus is a perfect example. The problem was not that the people felt thirsty and said so. The problem wasn't even that they complained. The problem is seen in the final verse. Rather than trust God to satisfy their craving, they demanded proof and certainty. Let us recall, God had sent Moses to free them, provided the plagues, split the Red Sea, put a pillar of cloud and fire in the sky to guide them, and after all that they assumed God wouldn't listen to their request. Like us, their self-protective instinct turned them to fear and anger, rather than trust. They demanded proof of God's ongoing presence by insisting on provision when and how they required. They did not yet understand or trust God, so they tried to control their circumstances on their own terms.

When the Psalmist relates this same story, it sounds fearsome. We hear God's pronouncement as a judgment against them. But, in reality, this recounting explains a series of natural consequences. The people hardened their hearts against God. They did not trust in God's goodness. Their instinct for self-protection made them refuse to believe God even wanted to satisfy them. God pronounces "they shall not enter my rest" because rest can only be found through trust. It is our incessant efforts to satisfy ourselves that keeps us from rest. If we are not experiencing rest, it may be because we are working too hard to placate our desire **apart** from God.

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul talks about this rest as obtaining "peace with God". Through Jesus we experience the comfort of God's grace. Paul says this relationship of trust keeps us from anxiety when suffering comes. Rather than panicking when we experience physical lack, we who know Jesus, experience our challenges without anxiety. He says, "the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit". It's as if he's saying we are all holding cups and able to feel the fullness of the life of God pouring

into us, satisfying us regardless of our circumstances, if we will only allow ourselves to be open to feel it. Our salvation is experienced when we let go of our distrust.

Then, in John's gospel, we hear Jesus talking about the satisfaction of living water and eternal food. For Jesus, enduring satisfaction is a result of being constantly filled. But it isn't only about being filled, it's about feeling it, and moving out from that filling, from its power, to then fill and feed the world. According to Jesus, our appetite is not the problem. Our cravings, when felt and acknowledged, help point us to their satisfaction. Our desire exists to be satisfied. Satisfied, not placated, and not ignored. But true satisfaction is only available when we understand our desires. The woman at the well was legitimately thirsty; she came to draw physical water. And, as is true for us all, her life was an altar where the physical and spiritual met. Her body's need for water brought her to the well, but once her spiritual thirst was satisfied, she left her water jar to participate in the work that would satisfy her spiritual cravings. Our ability to be satisfied is bound up in our participation in the work for which we feel our cravings. We are not alone in our cravings. And when we allow ourselves to be filled, we help fill others, "so that the Sower and reaper may rejoice together".

The Psalmist began his worship with a call to everyone to praise God. Before he launches into an indictment against Moses' people, he names God our Maker and our shepherd. Both names indicate intimate knowing and protective love. When we know and trust God, we are freed to know and trust ourselves. We should not always trust our impulses, but our trust in God will strengthen us to name and understand the desire that fuels them. Once we recognize what we genuinely need, and trust God to provide it, our fear of lack and tendency towards overindulgence melts away.

May we be a people who can feel and revel in fullness and may our satisfied hearts bless the world with God's peace.