



Roanoke, Virginia

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“Again, and Again, and Again

John 6: 35-40

Jen Brothers

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; ³⁸ for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”

Sermon:

I’m hungry. Are you?

On her latest album, the singer songwriter Florence Welch takes our collective emotional hunger for granted. *We all have a hunger*, she sings, over and over again, giving voice to the loneliness and emptiness she says she experienced as a result of seeking love in things that were not love. When fans sing those words out loud, she says, “together we become a choir, a chorus, higher than the hurt, louder than loneliness.” We all have a hunger.



What do you hunger for?

I hunger for peace. I don't mean world peace. That would be great, but that's not where my mind goes when I wake up in the middle of the night. I want the peace that comes from knowing I'm doing right by the people I love, the peace that comes from knowing I'm enough, and all will be well, even though I have messed things up in the past and will continue to mess things up in the future. I hunger for the peace that comes from trusting my people are safe, and this world will go on, and things will get better.

What do you hunger for? The crowd who first heard Jesus' words from our text today hungered for bread—not just any bread, but Jesus's bread. They wanted this bread so badly they chased him from a mountain top to the other side of a lake because the day before, he had fed between 5 & 10,000 people from one little boy's lunch. Five loaves of bread and two fish had passed through Jesus' hands to become an ample feast for a huge crowd, with twelve baskets of leftovers to spare! And now the people he fed wanted more.

Do you think they really wanted more physical bread? Perhaps. But, in the context for which this gospel was written, bread and water symbolized abundant life, so I suspect while some would have settled for physical bread, what they really wanted was to tap into the abundant life force they experienced on that mountain top with Jesus. Whether they could understand this or not, Jesus articulated it for them. When they asked him for bread he said, in effect, *what you really want is me*. “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35).

Those are the words we find in the New Revised Standard Version of John 6:35. But, I happen to have just taken elementary Greek this summer and what I discovered when I went back to the Greek text amplified my understanding of Jesus' words. Don't worry, I am well aware I learned just enough Greek to be dangerous, so I ran my translation by my Greek professor before I dared share it with you. Listen to what the verse sounds like when we go back to the original Greek:

*Jesus said to them, “I, I am the bread of life; the one **coming moving toward me** No!—shall not hunger, and the one **believing into me** shall never thirst **at any time.**”*

*“I, I am the bread of life; the one **coming moving toward me** No!—shall not hunger, and the one **believing into me** shall never thirst **at any time.**”*

His words are that dramatic—that emphatic, and the verbs he uses are present tense participles, which, before taking Greek this summer meant nothing to me, I admit. But the fact that Jesus' words are recorded as present tense participles means something to me now. Participles are used to form continuous tenses, as in, *I'm thinking*... If *I'm thinking* I haven't just had a thought and moved on. I'm still in the process of thinking. My thinking has not yet come to an end—it is still going on.



When Jesus redirected the crowd from seeking physical bread to seeking him, his use of present tense participles communicated they would find the nourishment they sought through ongoing, continual action. *I, I am the bread of life*, he said. I am what you seek, and I will fill you and feed you **when you are coming moving toward me**. Our spiritual hunger is not satiated by a one and done come to Jesus moment, or by a baptism, or a confirmation, or a church membership, or a worship service.

But we already know this, don't we? Who among us can say, *I hunger no more—I am filled to the brim with abundance*? We thought this *thing*, or this moment, or this relationship would fill us, only to find out, no, not yet. So, we grow despondent, we lose hope. We turn toward other kinds of food for fulfillment, and yet our hunger persists. The only way we will find the abundant life we seek, Jesus tells us, is through continually coming moving toward him and believing into him.

Can you feel the movement in his statement? To remain stationary in our life of faith is, essentially, to starve. And while it would be lovely if our movement toward Jesus were a steady flow, I imagine it's more like a set of waves that break and recede, or a series of fasts and feasts. And that's ok! I suspect it's the only way. Our hunger will be satiated by simply coming to Jesus, and then coming again, and then coming again. And it's as simple as that. Jesus doesn't explain it any further. He leaves the rest of it to us. Because, if we are honest with ourselves, we know our hungers. We know those places within us where we yearn for more. And we know what it will take to turn to Jesus with them.

Take the hunger for human connection. Our collective use of Facebook and Instagram suggests this is a universal need—the need to know and be known by others. But any social media user knows this medium doesn't fill us up—it tends to leave us hungrier: insecure, envious, more lonely—as we see what everyone else seems to have that we don't.

What would it look like for us to move toward Jesus with this hunger? It might start with prayer, with letting God into those places of our heart where we hurt, or where we don't think we measure up. It might look like confession with a request for help. It might look like turning to scripture for deeper connection with God and God's ways. It might look like asking God to open up our eyes and hearts and minds, so we can see new sources for connection and relationship. It might look like trusting Jesus walks with us as we take a courageous step into a new or an old friendship.

I hunger to know my children will grow up safe and strong, and for the life of me, I can't fully rest at peace with this because I am afraid—afraid I didn't give them everything they need—afraid I hurt them somehow—afraid the world won't be kind to them. So, I take this fear to Jesus. Continually. I confess it. I visualize myself handing it over to him, asking him to take it from me. And then I trust. I trust Jesus loves them more than I do. I trust these claims of scripture: God is our redeemer. God works in ways I cannot even begin to fathom. God's will is that no one shall be lost, not one—not ever.



Trusting God with our deepest longings, our deepest fears, is difficult work. But it is the work of God's people. If we trust God enough to show up here on a Sunday morning, then let's keep coming moving toward Jesus— further **into** trust and belief. For Jesus said anyone who is coming to me, no, I shall not *ekballo* (John 6:37). This Greek word, *ekballo*, means to put out, drive out, throw out, or banish. No, Jesus said, “Anyone who is coming to me I will not banish— I will not throw out— for I have come down out of heaven to do the will of him who sent me. And God's will is this—that nothing God has given me shall be lost so that it will all be raised on the last day” (John 6:38-39).

This is why we can trust God. God has shown us, through the scriptures, through the prophets, and through intervening in human history, time and time again, that God's will is **no one** and **no thing** belonging to God shall ever be lost, banished, or thrown out. Ever. And you know who belongs to God? THE WHOLE WORLD.

“Which one of you,” Jesus asked the lawyers and the Pharisees, “having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?” (Luke 15:4). The answer was none of them. None of us. But that's the point. God is not like us. God stops at nothing to seek and save the one who is lost.

As long as we are coming to Jesus we cannot be lost, because the present participle I've been speaking of when Jesus described the one who is **coming** moving toward him—is the Greek verb **pros**, which depicts movement toward a goal or destination *with implied interaction and reciprocity*. When we are coming to Jesus, Jesus is already coming to us. Jesus has come and is coming and will always come for us. Because Jesus has always been doing God's will, which John perfectly summed up in chapter 3, verse 16. Listen to Frederick Bruner's translation of this well-worn verse: “*You see, God loved the world so much that he gave his One and Only Son, so that every single individual, whoever! who is [simply] entrusting oneself to him, would never be destroyed, oh no! but would even now have a deep, lasting Life!*” (Bruner, *The Gospel of John*, p. 201). God's will is that we have abundant life, here and now, by moving again and again toward the one who has always been moving toward us.

The question for us to consider is not, have we come to Jesus, but are we coming, moving again and again, toward Jesus—are we **believing into him**? If you are anything like me, the answer is yes and no. Where we are full, where we experience deep, abundant life we can say, *yes!* Where we hunger, where we seek more, where we do not have peace, the answer is, *not yet*. But don't be ashamed of your hungers, those needs and ambitions, those wounds and those fears—move toward Jesus with them, trusting Jesus is already moving toward you. Hand them over to him and believe into the love that first separated the light from the darkness; the love that breathed life into the first human; the love that heard the cries of the enslaved and intervened on their behalf; the love that willingly took human form to feed and to heal and to teach and to give himself up so that none of us would be lost. Come to this love again, and again, and again, to find the abundant life you seek. Amen.

