

Escaping the Tyranny of MORE!

What does God have to do to make us happy?

The book of Exodus tells the story of the Israelites in captivity in Egypt. They were in Egypt for four hundred years, and were treated as slaves for most of that time. Finally, at the right time, God chose Moses to lead the Israelites from slavery into freedom.

Admittedly, it was not an easy freedom. They went from Egypt, perhaps the greatest civilization of its day, into the desert -- but you would think that they would be grateful nevertheless. I am quite confident that, as slaves in Egypt, they had very little opportunity to enjoy the theater, fine restaurants, and other accoutrements of a great culture. Instead, they were mixing mortar and carrying stones to build the pyramids.

So you would think that they would be grateful, even in the desert, to be free but as we discussed last week they were not. For forty years God fed them with manna from heaven and water from a rock. It fell from heaven every day except the Sabbath, and the Israelites were always able to gather enough to feed themselves.

That happened many centuries before Jesus' time, but Jews then -- and Jews today -- remembered the manna as God's heavenly blessing bestowed on their people. It was one of the ways that they knew that they were God's people. It was one of God's great miracles -- and it was designed especially to meet the needs of the Israelites. Whenever they remembered their history, they always remembered Moses and the manna.

Which doesn't mean that the manna made them happy. They got tired of eating manna. They wanted steak and potatoes -- fresh green beans -- vine-ripened tomatoes -- squash -- well, maybe not squash. On the one hand, they were grateful that God had saved them, but on the other hand, they were like most of us -- they wanted MORE! BIGGER! BETTER! MORE!

Now fast-forward with me to another story. Jesus fed five thousand people on a mountainside with only a few loaves and fishes -- a boy's lunch Another great miracle!

But did that make the people happy?

NO! OF COURSE NOT! They were impressed with the feeding miracle, and started following Jesus around. But why? Because they wanted MORE! BIGGER! BETTER! MORE!

What they said was this. They said, "What sign are you going to give us, then, so that we may see it and believe you?"

What sign? Jesus had just fed thousands with a child's lunch, and they are asking what sign he is going to give them so that they might believe him. UNBELIEVABLE! At least it is unbelievable until you have worked with people for a while.

Don't get me wrong! There are lots of wonderful people out there -- but there are always a few people whose attitude is, "Don't tell me what you did for me yesterday -- show me what you did for me today!" No matter what you do, they want MORE! BIGGER! BETTER! MORE!

So these people told Jesus what they wanted. They said that Moses had given their ancestors manna in the desert -- and suggested that he might want to match that miracle -- and then they might believe in him. It wasn't that the feeding of the five thousand wasn't great, but it was only five thousand people -- or ten or twenty thousand -- and it was only one meal. Moses fed a whole nation three meals a day for forty years! Let's see you match, that, Jesus -- and then maybe we'll believe in you! What they were saying, of course, was that Jesus had not done badly with the feeding of the five thousand, but they wanted MORE! BIGGER! BETTER! MORE!

Whenever I read these Bible stories, I try to translate how their attitudes so long ago would be expressed today.

- God feeds billions of people every day, but we still say, "Give me a sign, God, and then -- maybe -- I'll believe in you!"
- God gives us food, clothing, shelter -- and so many things that our attics and storerooms are bulging -- and we still say, "Give me more, God! I still have some needs that you have totally failed to meet. My car is old -- my house is small -- my job is boring -- I haven't had a vacation in ever so long. Don't get me wrong! I appreciate what you have done, but it just isn't enough! Do

MORE! BIGGER! BETTER! MORE!

And so I return to the question with which I began this sermon -- What does God have to do to make us happy? Let me give you a clue. The answer is not MORE -- and for a very simple reason. When the answer is MORE, it will always be MORE.

- When the answer is MORE, nothing will ever be enough!
- When the answer is MORE, it means that we have become gluttons who will not be satisfied!
- When the answer is MORE, there is nothing that will ever make us happy -- no food -- no house -- no job -- no car -- no money -- no sex -- no adventure! NOTHING!
- When the answer is MORE, we will be satisfied for a moment -- and then, like the most pitiful junkie, will begin our search for the next hit!

And the reason is very simple! God has created us for something MORE THAN MORE. God has created us with a space deep inside that cannot be satisfied until it is filled with GOD! That God-space is designed so that only one thing can fill it -- and that is God. MORE cannot fill it! MORE just drains through, leaving us forever unsatisfied!

Blaise Pascal lived in the seventeenth century. He was a mathematical genius who was also a deeply spiritual man. While still a teenager he observed: "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person. And it can never be filled by any created thing. It can only be filled by God made known to us in Jesus Christ".

Jesus put it this way at verse 53:

Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,
you have no life in you.
Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life,
and I will raise them up on the last day;
for my flesh is true food
and my blood is true drink.

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me,
and I in them."

What does God have to do to make us happy? God has to give us himself! Without God, there is no happiness! And so God sent his Son Jesus into the world to fill that empty space within us -- so that we can finally be satisfied -- so that we might finally and forever be liberated from the tyranny of MORE!

When Jesus says that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood, he means two things:

- First, Jesus means that we must believe in him -- accepting him -- being willing to receive his love -- and love him in return. When Jesus speaks of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, he is talking about establishing a deep and abiding relationship. He is talking about filling that God-space -- once and for all.
- And, then, Jesus means that we should eat the bread that he tells us is his flesh -- and drink the wine that he tells us is his blood. He means that we should gather together as Christian folk to partake of the spiritual meal that has the capacity to fill us with himself. When we gather together around the Lord's Table, we not only receive Christ, but we will be filled with his presence in such a way we can help to strengthen the faith of others by our being together.

To the person trapped in the tyranny of MORE, it sounds like nothing-- but the truth is that MORE is nothing -- a bottomless pit that will never be filled. The irony is that the bite of bread and sip of wine that we receive at the Lord's Table is the one and only meal that can fill us completely -- that can satisfy us in our deepest reaches.

As we prayerfully consider Jesus' teaching this morning we will understand that when we have come into a living relationship with Jesus that the Eucharist will become more central to our lives. It will not be a meal of convenience that we will partake of when we have time, but it will become as important to us as the meals we eat during the week. We will understand more fully that to believe in Jesus also means being joined with other people who also believe in him so that together we are like a Mosaic of Jesus.

In his book, *When There Is No Miracle*, Robert Wise tells of hearing Cecil Henson tell his death story. Some years earlier, Henson was pronounced dead, and he

remained in that state for 20-30 minutes. He told of seeing and hearing things in that world to come that changed his life forever.

Cecil especially loved to talk about seeing a vision of the face of Jesus. It was not actually the face of Jesus, but was instead a great mosaic, made up of many small tiles. Each tiny tile contributed its little bit to the picture -- and the picture was the face of Jesus.

Then Cecil looked more closely, and realized that each face was not a tile but was instead a tiny picture of a person's face. Moreover, as he looked more closely, he found that he could recognize each of the faces that joined together to form the larger mosaic of Christ's face. He knew those faces -- all of them. They were all people who had loved him or who had helped him in some way. He saw his father and mother -- an aunt and uncle -- former teachers -- people with whom he had worked.

And then, having looking upon the face of Christ and all of the other faces, he felt God calling him to return to his earthly life to raise his son, Van. Cecil's wife had died some years before, and Van would have been orphaned if Cecil had died.

Cecil did return -- a surprise to the doctors, you can be sure. He lived for another twenty years, during which time he raised his son -- lived a life guided by the face that he had seen -- and shared his vision with as many as would listen.

As we learn to live our lives in relationship with Jesus we will see how important all our other relationships are. Relationships that find their focus around this altar as we learn that to escape the tyranny of MORE BIGGER BETTER MORE, so that we can find in Christ the one who fills that God shaped vacuum allowing us to see in others something of him.