



ST BART'S

A Sermon by

The Reverend Canon Stephanie Spellers

*Canon to the Presiding Bishop for Evangelism, Reconciliation,
and Creation Care*

True Flesh

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The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Based on Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18; Ephesians 6:10-20; John 6:56-60

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our Redeemer. Amen.

I have never been there, can't imagine such a place even exists, but there is a restaurant near Los Angeles where you can pay \$1,000 for a meal for two. It is called The French Laundry, and an old friend has been there a couple of times. He raves about it. Won't stop talking about Glazed Wolfe Ranch White Quail with Caramelized Fennel Bulb and Minneola Tangerine Marmalade. Waited six months for a reservation, just to get to that table.

I try to imagine that kind of desire, the hunger. The agony and ecstasy of waiting for a bite. It doesn't even matter what it tasted like, if the quail was actually a little rubbery, if he never got full. I'm just wondering, this morning, about his consuming hunger for a taste of the French Laundry.

And I'm wondering what you're hungry for? Really hungry for? What makes your mouth water? What makes your soul water? And if I can take this a little deeper—and you knew this was coming—have you ever hungered for God like that? Have you ever begged for the sight, the company, the taste of Jesus? When? Why? It's good to know what you're hungry for.

And it's good to stay in touch with your hunger for God. Hunger for the holy is a good thing. First, because I think Jesus wants us to be hungry for him. More than for the best meal we ever had. More than almost anything. He stands before the crowd, trying to get them to understand. "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."

It's like he's telling them, "I know you liked the bread and fish I just shared with you on the mountain. But that's just going to nourish your bodies for a moment. I'm trying to give you bread, sustenance, my flesh, my very life. And if you take me into you, all the way into you, you will have life more abundant, more rich, more full, than anything you could ever wrap your mind or your tongue around."

He wanted them to crave him, to need him, to eat him and get their fill. And not in a pretty, civilized way. John intentionally chooses a word much more evocative than eat: Gnaw. Munch. If you gnaw on my flesh and drink my blood, you will have eternal life. I will become part of you. You will live a life that cannot know death. Take a hunk out of me, and chew me and swallow me. Crave this food, my flesh, like it's the only real food there is.

There's another reason to get in touch with your hunger for God. Because you have to be hungry for God to get full of God. Sounds simple enough. In his book *The God We Never Knew*, Marcus Borg talks about a study showing that among mainline churches—that's the Methodists, United Church of Christ,

Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, the traditional old denominations as compared to the newer churches with roots in American soil—of all these mainline churches, the ones that are growing are full of God.

There is a palpable sense that they are in love with God, in a living, transforming, risky relationship with God. And the ones that are declining are uncertain, hesitant about God, unclear about their real need for God. Nobody's saying we have to have all the answers, that there's no room for doubts or questions or mystery. But we do have to have a palpable hunger. The only way we get full of God, is if we're in touch with that deepest, most plaintive yearning for God.

It's kind of logical, if you think about it. If we want God, and we're willing to risk something and open the closed places, smile and dance like fools in the rain, shed our tears at the altar, shake our fists at the sky and yell, "Where are you?!" well then God can come into that needy, hungry space and really fill us up.

Somebody out there is going to call me on bad, works-righteousness theology. I'm not saying God only pours love onto those who work for it. But surely we can admit that we've all been in tight spots, when we couldn't imagine a way out, and then remembered to ask for God. And then when that bright presence comes, when strength arrives, when love breaks in, it's the sweetest thing ever. And you wanna tell somebody. And you wanna go back to the source, over and over again, to stay full of God. And when other people come into your presence, they are struck by the fullness of God that pours out of you. The space around you is a healing space, a life-giving space, a God-space that people flock to.

But all that fullness starts with hunger. Hunger for the bread of life. Hunger for God. I've gone through periods when I forgot to be hungry for God, because I was so satisfied with everything else. Lately, I've been feeling the need for the bread of life. Maybe you've felt it, too. The summer is so hot, our planet is on fire. Afghanistan has fallen and people are dying on the tarmac clinging to departing airplanes.

There's only so much I can take before my prayers stop becoming coherent, and all I can utter is, God, we need you so desperately now. We need your breath of life. Death is everywhere. Give us an alternate vision for community. Help us to speak your word of life. Help us to keep planting the seeds of life and peace internally and externally, and to believe that your kingdom can still come, that we're never so far off the path that we can't still come home. Give us the bread of life, Jesus. We need it now.

You ever cry out for just a crumb of the bread of life? Ever been hungry for God? Are you hungry right now? Then let yourself open. Let yourself crave. Hold your hand out for the bread of life. Let it come to you in scripture. In community. In the breaking of bread. In a song, in an icon, in a touch, in silence.

And when it comes—because it will, it will, God promised that it would—when that taste and presence lands in your hands, grab it, gnaw it, munch it, forget the knife and fork, the pretty words and formal manners. Gorge yourself. Get full of God. I wish you would. People right outside your door, your colleagues, your children, your best friends: people are waiting to meet someone who is full of God. The world is crying out, dying, for people who are full of God. No six-month wait. No reservations necessary. All you need is the hunger. God will do the rest.

Amen.

325 Park Avenue at 51st Street, New York, New York 10022