

March 14, 2012

Questions for Lent and Easter  
The Hunger Question  
John 6:1-15

**Opening Words:** John Simone Sr. once said, "*The key to wisdom is knowing all the right questions.*" I think, he is correct. Even without answers, questions have value. After all, what is a question? A question is nothing more than a request for more information. Only fools think they know everything. How many questions have you asked in your lifetime? Jesus asked twenty questions in the Gospel of John. Those questions are the foundation of my newest sermon series, *Questions for Lent and Easter*. We are going to look at twelve different questions the Master asked. Each one is an excellent question because each one is timeless.

This is message number seven, in this twelve part sermon series. I have called this message *The Hunger Question*. It comes from John's version of the feeding of the 5,000. Never underestimate the significance of this story. Did you know there are only two stories that are found in all four Gospels? The first story is the resurrection. The second story is the feeding of the 5,000. It demonstrates Jesus' concern for human need and it sets the stage for the statement, Jesus is the bread of life. May God give you ears to hear this evening's Gospel lesson, John 6:1-15.

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**John 6:1-15** 1 Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), 2 and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. 3 Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. 4 The Jewish Passover Festival was near. 5 When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" 6 He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" 8 Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 9 "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" 10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). 11 Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. 12 When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." 13 So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. 14 After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the

Prophet who is to come into the world." 15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

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The statistics are shocking! Consider these facts with me from the United Nations. First, 15 million child die annually from starvation. Second, three billion people in our world survive on \$2 a day or less. Third, every seven seconds someone starves to death in our world. That means every time you blink your eyes someone in our world has passed from a lack of food. I find those facts not just shocking; I find them upsetting. How much have you eaten today?

We find ourselves this evening in the sixth chapter of John. According to the text, Jesus is trying to be alone, with the disciples. That is why they went to the far side of the Sea of Galilee and ascended to the mountainside. The problem is the crowd continued to follow him because they had heard of his miracles. Instead of isolation, Jesus finds congestion. Instead of being rattled by the crowd, Jesus remained calm. He seizes opportunity to teach the disciples about the Kingdom of God. Verses 5 and 6 are key. Listen to those words one more time, *"When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?' He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do."* You know how the story ends. Everyone goes home with full stomachs. Some went home with more; some went home with a clearer understanding of God's will for their lives.

The story of the feeding of the 5,000 tells us two things about Jesus. First, the Master was concerned the spiritual needs of people. He is the bread of life. He is the only one who can satisfy your spiritual hunger. Second, the Master is concerned about basic human needs. He could have sent them home hungry. Instead, he sends them home full. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ so you must care about basic human need. Do you remember the facts? Someone in our world is dying every seven seconds from a lack of food. Do you care? Do you really care? Jesus does!

Let me stop for a second and make this proclamation. I know what you are thinking. Why look at world hunger at a pot luck dinner? It is a little hypocritical. However, I have to say that everything I ate tonight was great! I have never seen a meal I didn't like. The chicken was great! The beans were great! The pizza was great! The pasta was great. I ate things I couldn't identify. I really enjoyed the salad and the deserts looked outstanding! I am so full I may never eat again. Well, I won't eat until my night time snack and I am already thinking about my breakfast menu. A new member to this church said to me recently, "I love this church. We eat all the time!" Let me say this clearly.

There is nothing wrong with eating dinner. Eating supper is not a sin. Jesus

wants us to eat; Jesus wants us to be healthy. However, it is a sin to not to worry about world hunger. It is a sin of omission. Did you know there are two kinds of sin? There are sins of commission, the things we do. There are sins of omission, the things we should do. Those sins terrify me. How much should we be doing to comfort the needy in our world? If you are doing nothing about world hunger then you are committing a sin of omission!

My goal this evening is to help you eliminate this sin of omission. I am going to do this in two ways. First, I want you to admit there is a problem. Second, I want you to become part of the solution. I am going to do those two things by looking at the text for this evening. For in these words are three very practical points. This is the first, there is a time for **honesty**. This is the second, there is a time for **action**. This is the third, there is a time for **Jesus**. Each one is illustrated in the text for this evening. So if you are ready to begin say, "**Amen!**"

### **There is a time for honesty.**

This is statement number one: there is a time for honesty. Look at the text with me. Jesus and the disciples are on a mountainside on the far side of the Sea of Galilee. They look out and see is a throng of people. We find out later there are approximately 5,000 people following Jesus. The Master isn't just shocked by the crowd; The Master is concerned about them. That is one of the things that makes Jesus different from us. While most are only concerned about themselves; Jesus is concerned with others. There is a time for honest. Be honest with yourself. How concerned are you about the basic needs of others? The story begins with a heavy dose of honesty. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

Late last Saturday night my daughter, Anna, got home from a mission trip to El Salvador. She spent that night in the Cleveland area with her sister. I picked her up on Sunday afternoon. On Sunday evening, Kathryn and I took her out to dinner. We wanted to here all the details. She had an amazing trip and pushed herself beyond her comfort zone. She said she was proud of herself. Kathryn and I are very proud of her. While many college students were drinking cold Coronas with a lime on a hot beach, Anna was helping some of the poorest people in the Western Hemisphere.

Several people asked me if I was worried about her. I said, "No! I trust Anna. She wouldn't hurt anyone. She only weighs about 100 pounds. I knew what they were really saying. They wanted to know if I was concerned about her safety. The answer was still, "No! " I wasn't worried about her safety because God was with her. However, I do have a greater concern. I am more concerned my children will leave my care ignorant of the suffering in this world. After all, they are Americans and many Americans live their lives in isolation. Many Americans believe we are the only ones who value work. Many Americans believe we are special and deserve special treatment. Shallow patriotism tells us we have a

special place in the heart of God. However, the Bible never mentions the United States of America by name. The Bible does say God loves all people equally. With all of our problems, America is still a land of great wealth and opportunity. You can live and die in America and never witness the suffering in this world. America is different from many countries in the world. While someone in the world is dying every seven seconds from starvation. America is battling with ramp it obesity. If you think there is something wrong with that statement say, "**Amen!**" Did I tell you Kathryn and I are going to Haiti this summer?

### **There is a time for action.**

This is statement number two: there is a time for action. Look at the text with me one more time. Once Jesus recognized the problem, he turned to the disciples for a solution. Philip tries to solve the problem with money. Andrew begins to collect food. He came up a little short. How do you feed 5,000 people with five loaves of barley bread and two small fish? They fail in their efforts but I give them credit. They did something to eliminate the problem. What did the other ten disciples do? They did nothing! How many people do you know are doing nothing about world hunger? There is a time for action. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

Tradition tells us all the disciples were martyred except one, John. He died at the age of one hundred and was truly loved by the early church. He preached to the very end. He was an old weak preacher. He was so old and weak they carried him in on a pallet. He was so old and weak he couldn't lift his head. He was so old and weak his sermons were kind of short. One of his last sermons only lasted three words. (Don't you wish you could hear a three word sermon?) This was John's three word sermon: LOVE ONE ANOTHER! Maybe John knew something we have forgotten. We spend too much time talking and not enough time doing.

This evening I am going to ask you to do something about hunger. We don't usually take an offering at these services but tonight we will. I want to disarm all the politics and opinions and send the money to a local food bank, Second Harvest. I hope you give generously. There is a time for action and the time is now. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

### **There is a time for Jesus.**

This is statement number three: there is a time for Jesus. Look at the text with me one more time. Jesus has identified the problem! Five thousand people have to eat! Philip and Andrew tried to solve the problem but they came up a little short. How do you feed 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two small fish? The story ends with the camera squarely on Jesus. The Master is the bread of life. When all the food was consumed the people were full. The problem is a couple of hours later they were hungry again. Jesus was glad the people ate but what he really wanted was for them to be spiritually satisfied for eternity. I glad

you had a great supper this evening. The problem is we are going to be hungry again in a few hours. If you want to be spiritually satisfied for eternity then you must know Jesus as your Lord and Savior. If you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior say, **"Amen!"**

You do the math. If I have just talked for fifteen minutes and someone in our world dyes of starvation ever seven second then 129 people have died since I began. Do you care? Do you really care? Jesus does! Will you please pray with me?