

This is probably not the best time to be talking about hunger, at least not our own. This weekend is known, not only for giving thanks, watching football, and shopping, but also for eating - and eating a lot. As stuffed as turkeys, we waddle from the table to the sofa and declare we'll never eat another bite - that is until that pumpkin pie starts whispering your name from the kitchen. No, we do not go hungry.

Now I have to say right now that I'm talking to a small group of people tonight who are doing OK, even with the financial meltdown. We may have had to cut back and reevaluate our spending priorities, but we're able to feed ourselves and even have some left to help others. And we're very aware of the need for that help. An MSNBC report claims that one in six Americans say they don't have enough to eat. And because these words do go up on the website and are listened to or read by others who are not here tonight, we have to assume that there are some who did not have enough to eat today.

All this is to say that we do not take the subject of physical hunger lightly. But as we begin this Advent season of waiting and introspection, we acknowledge that there are many kinds of hunger. The words I wrote in *Keeping in Touch* are synonyms for an emotional hunger: yearning, desire, longing, aching, wanting, wishing, pining.

Our theme for Advent is "Hungering for God." In Epiphany, we'll take up more of the physical hunger aspect. But from a spiritual perspective, Advent is a time to reflect on our lives and see what it is that our souls hunger for. What is your deepest longing and how does the birth of Christ into our hearts and world feed your soul? What is your deepest longing?

To get started, we can start by looking at the biblical texts. The passage from Jeremiah speaks with intense yearning for a time when an anointed king (*masiah*) of David's line would come to bring righteousness and justice and security to a nation that had been buffeted between first the Assyrian empire and then the Babylonian empire. Jeremiah wrote to a people who had experienced a national disaster, and we can understand how his words spoke to the hunger of a people for a word of hope: "the days are surely coming, says Yahweh, when I will fulfill the promise I made to Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time I will raise up a righteous branch from the line of David, who will bring justice and righteousness to the land. In those days Judah will be safe and Jerusalem will be secure."

700 years later, in Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, we have probably the first part of the New Testament to be written, possibly no more than twenty years after the resurrection. A prominent theme in these letters is the expectation that Jesus would soon return to establish God's eternal reign of justice, love and peace. This was the longing of all the followers of Jesus at that time, since they believed Jesus was the promised *masiah* and their days of living at the mercy of invading empires was about to end.

The gospel also shows how the expectation of Christ's return dominated early Christian thought. We're put off by apocalyptic language, but take a look behind this prophesy of disaster and upheaval. Underlying it is the view of the world as a structure put in place and kept there by divine command. Genesis 1 assumes that the natural condition of the world without God's intervention is chaos. In this week's gospel, the created order is imagined as coming apart prior to the arrival of the Human One.

This is an ancient expression of the eternal human wish for order and predictability. And there is no doubt, at the time of this gospel's writing, chaos did reign. These were not necessarily predictions, but a reflection of what was happening. All of the gospels were written after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 CE and reflect that national disaster. So in this passage we may be hearing the longing of the leaders of

the Christian community for Christ's return to their endangered community in the words of Jewish apocalypse taken from the Hebrew scriptures they knew so well.

Of course these are not isolated incidents of a people hungering for justice and freedom. We just celebrated the fall of the Berlin Wall; what heartache and longing preceded that. And the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa. And the end of the exclusionary policies in the ELCA towards lgbt clergy. Many instances in which our hunger for righteousness has been fed – which then gives us hope for those places still awaiting the fulfillment of the promise.

Which brings us back to the question of our deepest longings. Some of our hunger is for justice and righteousness and freedom, for the biblical vision of shalom. For an end to war, an end to corporate greed, an end to gun violence, to sex trafficking, to the devastation of our planet. That list can go on and on. World AIDS Day tomorrow reminds us that the HIV epidemic is not over. As we come into Advent, we come famished by our hunger for so many things to be put right in our world.

As we come into Advent, we come famished by our hunger for so many things to be put right in our own lives. What is your deepest longing for yourself? It might take some time to really get at this. We tend to cover up our spiritual hunger by calling it something else – an addiction, an attitude, a disorder. Not that we might not have these, but underneath it all is that hole in the soul crying out to be filled with the kind of food not found among the Thanksgiving leftovers.

What is your deepest yearning; what do you long for? Love, happiness, security, family, peace of mind, health, community, freedom, acceptance, courage, all of the above? Whatever it may be, it is the hunger we bring with us into Advent. This is a pretty heavy, existential question, not what most people would expect as part of the preparations for Christmas. There's so much to be done in the next four weeks; who has time for all this navel-gazing? Maybe we could wait and think about it after Christmas.

But here's the thing: Christmas is not just about a day long ago when a child was born into a family in Judea. Christmas is also about the birth of Christ into our hearts every day - our hearts that are empty or broken or afraid or longing for – you fill in the blank. And begin the adventure of Advent which asks you: What is your deepest longing and how does the birth of Christ into your heart feed your hunger?

The overarching theme of Advent is the idea of God coming to us in the form of Jesus. But this is not to say that we can make a wish and expect that in four weeks, our fondest dreams will come true. In a way, Advent is a season that messes with our sense of time; it's about the incomplete and the not-yet. We are drawn beyond focusing only on the past, and invited to trust that God is present in all our immediate experiences, and will continue to be present and active in our future. In other words, God comes to each of us in each moment. Advent tells us that we do not have the final word. There is always more to God, and to life, than what we have seen so far. Advent is not simply a preparation to celebrate Christmas. It is an invitation to welcome the One Who Comes.

This is what gives us hope for the future. This is what feeds us. Now, do we want to be fed? Do we want God messing around in our secret lives or deepest psyches? Maybe not. Or maybe not yet. But if we are honest – with ourselves and with God – we know we have a hole that can't be filled by our attempts alone. And the first step is to begin to allow the birth of Christ into our hearts feed our hunger. This is the Advent adventure. In the words of Luke's gospel: "Look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Amen

