

**NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE LESSON, Ephesians 4:25-5:2** (NRSV)

*Paul teaches new Christians that each contrary behavior we have has a good and right behavior that is pleasing to God and follows the example of Christ.*

**4**<sup>25</sup> So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. <sup>26</sup> Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and do not make room for the devil. <sup>28</sup> Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. <sup>29</sup> Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up,<sup>[a]</sup> as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, <sup>32</sup> and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.<sup>[b]</sup> **5**<sup>1</sup> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, <sup>2</sup> and live in love, as Christ loved us<sup>[c]</sup> and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

**Footnotes:**

- a. [Ephesians 4:29](#) Other ancient authorities read *building up faith*
- b. [Ephesians 4:32](#) Other ancient authorities read *us*
- c. [Ephesians 5:2](#) Other ancient authorities read *you*

**GOSPEL LESSON, John 6:24-35** (NRSV)

*Jesus discusses the difference between bread for the stomach and bread for the soul.*

**6**<sup>24</sup> So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

<sup>25</sup> When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" <sup>26</sup> Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. <sup>27</sup> Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." <sup>28</sup> Then they said to him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." <sup>30</sup> So they said to him, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? <sup>31</sup> Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" <sup>32</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is that which<sup>[a]</sup> comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." <sup>34</sup> They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

<sup>35</sup> 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.

**Footnotes:**

- a. [John 6:33](#) Or *he who*

In the early 1970s, we Hansens would pile into our Catalina station wagon and head off on trips to campgrounds and the mountains of Vermont where we would visit family friends. And, whenever we needed more gasoline, we'd pull into a Sunoco station where my dad would roll down the window and say to the attendant, "Fill 'er up, 220." For those of you who remember the time, those numbers referred to the amount of octane additive to mix into the leaded gas; and what I learned about that is that my dad didn't fill the gas tank with the *cheapest* gas; he put a *medium* grade gas in. He might not be able to afford the highest grade each time, but he filled up with something better than the least.

Not too many years ago my now 19 year old VW Passat started to cough and ping. I thought I'd have a hefty bill ahead of me, but the mechanic simply asked me what grade gas I was using. I confessed to using the cheap stuff. He told me to use the good stuff. Within a *minute* of my trip to the gas station to fill up, my car was purring. So...what kind of gas are you filling your tank with? And, no, I'm not talking about your car. I'm talking about *you!*

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Put another way, Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life. The person who aligns with me hungers no more and thirsts no more, *ever.*"

Put yet another way, Jesus said, "I am the bread that gives life. If you come to my table and eat, you will never go hungry. Believe in me, and you will never go thirsty."

Are you hungry? Are you thirsty? What are you filling your tank with? This is our question for the day. Because, every day we make choices about what we are going to fill up with – whether it's food, or alcohol, or gossip, or work, or the internet – good and otherwise, but have you ever lost an hour on Facebook? Those are a few things we can fill our tanks up with.

And there are other things, too. What was it our letter to the Ephesians brought to our attention? Oh, yes, some days, Paul says, people are filling up on falsehoods – that's lying – or anger, theft, evil talk, bitterness, wrath, wrangling – that's backbiting, malice...oh, he had quite a list! Feel free to go back to it at any time if you'd like to double check yourself to make sure that you aren't filling up on any of these things. Because – as we are beginning to figure out – these don't make up the daily bread that will actually and truly fill us up.

*Eat this bread, drink this cup,  
come to me and never be hungry.  
Eat this bread, drink this cup,  
trust in me and you will not thirst.*

Are you hungry? How are you filling that hunger?

I have a confession. I have a problem with...cookies. In my days of gluten and dairy, my favorites were Oreos and Vienna Fingers. Give me a crunchy cookie with just a little schmear of filling and I'm as happy as can be. The problem is, give me the box...and I'm likely to eat half of it! People who know me know not to give me the whole box of cookies. Because when *I fill up* on cookies...all I really get is a stomach ache.

Cookies hardly have the nutrition I'm going to need to make it through the day. True, I'm going to feel full...and sick...but eventually I'm going to be worrying about my complexion and...I'm going to be hungry again. So, what then? The other half of the box?

The question I began to have for myself was: what am I really hungry for? We're overeating for a myriad of unfulfilled issues in our lives. This eating thing is a *problem!* And Weight Watchers and Jenny Craig and Slim Fast are all out there trying to help us get out of our problem. But have you ever asked why is it that we are so hungry?

We don't usually diagnose spiritual hunger well. Ever binge on the internet? Ever look up from your phone or tablet or computer screen to find that an hour...or two...or three has gone by? Why is that? Maybe it's because it makes us feel connected and full for a while instead of alone and empty. We watch pretty videos that make us feel good; funny videos that make us laugh; and sad videos that move us to tears. We fill up on these emotions for a while. It's cathartic.

But then we also go on those websites where we can buy stuff – like home furnishings and clothing, shoe wear and jewelry. Those purchases fill us up for a while, too. But then we're hungry again.

We can also fill our hunger with lying, anger, theft, foul words, bitterness, slander, shouting, and our temper – which seemed to be the problem with the people back in Ephesus. Thank God, we don't do that!



But...then, again, maybe we do. Because we have a hard time diagnosing our spiritual hunger. We're restless and we're searching. And we never find ourselves at calm or at peace or at rest or at our destination until we rest in God. We are never full...until we fill up on God.

Michael W. Smith is a Christian songwriter/singer whose music I've known since I was in college. He wrote a song about 17 years ago called "Breathe" that still finds its way into worship services – today. He sings,

*This is the air I breathe, This is the air I breathe  
Your holy presence living in me  
This is my daily bread, This is my daily bread  
Your very word spoken to me  
And I'm desperate for you, And I'm lost without you  
This is the air I breathe, This is the air I breathe  
Your holy presence living in me  
This is my daily bread, this is my daily bread  
your very word spoken to me  
And I'm, I'm desperate for you, And I'm, I'm lost without you  
I'm lost without you. I'm lost without you. I'm desperate for you.  
In a live recording he calls out (Cry out to live)*

And you can hear the whole audience begin to sing with him.

*I'm desperate for you. I'm lost, I'm lost, I'm lost without you.*

Then he calls out to them: (*How many of you are hungry for God?*) and the crowd erupts.

Finally, you hear him say: (*I want more of Him. Who wants the flood gates to open up?*) and, again, the spiritually hungry crowd erupts.

A crowd chased Jesus down in our scripture lesson this morning. They had had a free meal ticket the day before and they wanted to double up. So they waited for him, and when he didn't come to them, they went and found him.

Some who read this story say that Jesus is being insensitive. These were hungry people! Why wasn't he feeding them? The answer to that is that Jesus could tell what kind of hunger they had. Had they been emaciated or truly physically hungry, he would have fed them. After all, he tells the story about the king who says, "When I was hungry you, fed me." But Jesus has obviously sized these folks up and recognized that they were not *physically* hungry; they were *spiritually* starving.

They were hungry for meaning in their lives. They were hungry for direction. They were hungry for fulfillment. They were hungry for Love that does not fail and does not end. In short: They were hungry for God.

And Jesus said to them that day, "I can show you all of that. I can teach you all of that. In fact, if you emulate me – do what I do – follow God, like I do. Love, like I do. You will have direction. You will have meaning. You will be fulfilled. You will have love and give love. You'll make the world more like...heaven. Eat me up like bread and drink me up like the water of life – and you will no longer be hungry or thirsty.

And so, we come to Christ's table today. We eat a little piece of bread and take a little dip or a little sip of juice. Physically, it's not much. But, spiritually, it's a banquet! As you eat the bread, open yourself to be filled with Christ. As you dip or sip, allow yourself to experience the richness of Christ's promise to quench your deep thirst.

Life is going to make you hungry. Be sure you fill up on the right stuff. Fill up on Jesus. Who is always right there beside you. Jesus will be your bread, your drink, and your guide until the end.

Fill up on the Holy Spirit. You have nothing to fear as long as the Spirit is near.

Fill up on the Bible, which is a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path.

Fill up on God who is love – pure love, the purist love. It doesn't get better than this.

(ref. *Thy Word*. Amy Grant & Michael W. Smith.)

What you do here each Sunday morning is so very important. But don't stop there with just this one day. Carry it over into every day. Don't be hungry. Don't be thirsty. Dig in – fill up and be satisfied.

*Fill my cup, Lord, I lift it up, Lord.*

*Come and quench this thirsting of my soul.*

*Bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more;*

*fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole.*

Blessings on the journey. Amen.