

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

Our dog, Fin, is like a four-legged, hairy alarm clock.



Since Tripp and I get up
about the same time every morning
during the work week,
Fin will start to stir a few minutes
before the morning alarm goes off.
You can hear her dog toenails on the kitchen floor
and her dog tags jingle
as she wags her tail in anticipation.

Now as good as she is about getting up on time,
what she is even more insistent on,
is an exact dinner time.

Fin eats at 6pm on the dot most every day,
except Wednesdays,
because no one is home at 6pm on Wednesdays;
we're all here.

But every other day
no matter what chaos is going on in our house,
particularly in the kitchen,
Fin prances around
and does this silent, dog-chattering thing,
reminding us that her dinner time
is approaching.

Most of the time, we spend 30 mins
relaying a countdown to her:
"Fin, you have 25 more minutes;"
"Fin, calm down you have 22 more mins;"
"Fin you have 18 more mins..." you get the idea.
Fin doesn't do much during the day
so I'm not sure how she burns off her breakfast,

but when we get down
to the *five-minute and under* mark,
she is all but leaping off the floor
—*as only an 80lbs dog can*—
for her dinner.

Watching Fin, you would think
her dinner is a matter of life or death.

On the other side of this is Huntley.



Who will glance at a plate of food
and declare she doesn't like it.

Just by looking.

Some of your children
might possess a similar talent.

We can level the threat,
*there will be no more food for you
until breakfast tomorrow
if you don't eat your dinner,*

but Huntley is resolute in her decision to fast.

It might sound a little harsh,
that we don't give Huntley any other food
if she doesn't eat her dinner
—but most of the time the child
won't even try a bite!

The good news is
we know Huntley isn't going to starve.

When she has *chosen* to skip dinner the night before,
Huntley's almost always hungry
first thing the next morning.

We can all relate to that grumbling
in our stomachs when we haven't eaten
or I know some people who forget to eat
(*what even is that?!?*).

I've tried to make myself
eat less sugar but fail—
I keep a bag of gummy bears
in my office drawer,
which are good, but don't really satisfy hunger.
Plenty of us have had bad relationships with diets
and tried to consume less calories—
but the fact of the matter remains,
we must eat and drink to stay alive.



Our bodies can only go
three days without water.
And our bodies can only go a few weeks
without food.
Being hungry and thirsty **for real**,
can be a matter of life and death.

*Blessed are those who hunger
and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied.*

But is it a matter of life and death,
if what you hunger and thirst for
is righteousness or justice?

Four years ago, I'm sure you remember,
Whit and I did a series
on reclaiming certain words from
our Christian tradition;
we called it, The Lost Language of Salvation.
We preached on words like
sin, salvation, righteousness.
Righteousness, in case we don't remember,
the yearning and struggle

to be 'righteous'
at its core, means,
one whose aim is true.

If our aim is God

—communion with the Trinity,
(meaning,) right relationship
with the Almighty and each other,
then sin, can be defined as
missing the mark to speak.
Sin is that breakdown in our relationships.

The turning of our aim then,
back toward the mark

of right relationship with Christ and others,
is our attempt at righteousness.
Attempting to align ourselves with God's will,
means we strive to lead a life
pleasing to God.

So when Jesus is talking about

those who hunger and thirst for righteousness
he is speaking to people who are in the thick of it;
the ones who know that the world
is not aligned with God's will.

This New Testament crowd is expectant
for the Messiah to do something
for their very real hunger and thirst.

Their hunger and thirst is a matter of survival
of physical means and spiritual ones;
they cannot be separated.

When the Christ comes,
"our crops will grow
and we will no longer be a people
ruled by an oppressive hand;
our enemies will be vanquished
all will be made right!"

—this is the expectation
of what God's righteousness will look like.

Precisely because righteousness
can be translated also as justice,
what Christ proclaims is
that spiritual righteousness or 'rightness with God'
is tied to a lived justice among all people.

God's people were not just hungry
for the Messiah to bring God's reign and justice
to their marginalized community;
they were also starving,
for God's will to be a reality
so they could feed their families and their faith.

But notice Jesus doesn't say,
blessed are those ***who are righteous***
—it is those who are hungry, thirsty,
yearning to hit the mark,
they are the ones who are given
God's grace, God's blessing.



Righteousness is living a life
that is pleasing to God;
a life spent doing the right thing:
even though it is incredibly hard.
Maybe that is why Jesus makes a point
to bless those who know the struggle,
who know the yearning and the pain
of trying to live a life that is pleasing to God.

Jesus is blessing the people who understand,
in their lives and in the world,
it is a matter of survival,
real hunger, real thirst;

it is a matter of survival
to try to live a life pleasing to God.

Dave Peterson says,
this beatitude is basically,
“Jesus referring...to a person who declares,
‘I’ll die if I can’t find a way
to please God and do what’s right.’”

That is hunger and thirst for righteousness.

The promise is made
not to those who always do the right thing
but who are longing to do it...striving to do it.¹
“...The [ones hungry for] righteousness
let their hearts and heads
be dominated by God’s vision for life down here;
and this ‘righteousness’ is never merely spiritual
but is expressed
in specific concrete acts.”²

As Christians we
should always be hungry
and thirsty for righteousness;
we should constantly be willing
to do the work of justice here and now
because physical hunger and spiritual hunger
cannot be separated.
The spiritual yearning and hunger
we have for right relationship
with God and neighbor
is always expressed in a hunger
for us to live lives of justice.

So in order for our lives
to be close to righteous
without falling into the trap

¹ Dave Peterson, <https://www.theologyofwork.org/the-high-calling/ill-die-if-i-dont>

² James C. Howell, *The Beatitudes for Today* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, KY: 2005)

of being either self-righteous
or develop into a pattern of works righteousness...

concrete, specific acts of justice
are what keep us grounded and hungry.

Colossians describes some of these concrete acts
for a life that displays
God's righteousness:

¹²As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,
clothe yourselves with compassion,
kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

¹³Bear with one another and,
if anyone has a complaint against another,
forgive each other;

just as the Lord has forgiven you,
so you also must forgive.

¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love,
which binds everything together
in perfect harmony.

¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,
to which indeed you were called in the one body.
And be thankful.

¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly;
teach and admonish one another in all wisdom;
and with gratitude in your hearts
sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father
through him."

Colossians 3:12-17



This is not easy living;
this is hard.

But because we are committed to justice
we must ask ourselves and our community:

Are we trying to live a life
pleasing to God?

Are we trying to practice compassion,
kindness, humility, meekness,
patience, and love
with each other and ourselves?

Are we practicing as God's people
to be thankful;
do we let God's word dwell in us richly
to teach each other in wisdom?

This is our task as community,
as Christ's church,

to be those who would hunger,
who would thirst for
this kind of righteousness,
this kind of right living,
these kinds of concrete acts.

To be the church that forgives people
because we are a forgiven people
and a church that most of all
clothes itself in love.

And here's the thing;

in the sermon on the mount,
Jesus gives out blessing after blessing after blessing
—and not to the righteous, as we've said—
but to those who we're least likely to expect:
blessings for the poor in spirit,

the mourners, the meek,
those who hunger and thirst
(physically and spiritually)
for righteousness.

“Jesus simply declares
that they have already been blessed.
So the beatitudes are first of all
declarations of God’s grace.

They are not conditions of salvation
or roadmaps to earn entry to God’s kingdom...
The beatitudes are not a judgment
against all who fail to measure up.

**Instead, they are a blessing for any who consent
to join themselves to God’s kingdom
as it “comes near.”³**

This has never been about *an arrival*
but has always been about *the arriving*.

Rob Bell loves to say,
once you’ve tasted you can’t un-taste
—remember Psalm 34, ‘taste and see that the Lord is good...’
Once we have been given a glimpse of the kingdom,
we are hungry for more.

We could think of people
who hunger and thirst for righteousness like,
“...individual paints on a painter’s palette.
Learning to live rightly
involves mixing and applying
these God-pleasing qualities
in the course of everyday life.”

Everything we do, is done in Christ.
And when that righteousness
is what we strive and hunger and thirst for

³ <https://www.theologyofwork.org/new-testament/matthew>

something surprising happens. *(play Youtube clip)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9ficvPdpZg>



Isn't that amazing?

Who saw that coming?

Isn't it wonderful to think what

mixing those shapes and colors;

those qualities of righteousness

—what living these characteristics

in our lives everyday can display?

When Carol Anne and I

were talking about worship this week,

and I sent her this video she said,

“We do our best

to put the right color paint where it goes

and then God flips it over for us

so we can see.

Which is satisfying...or maybe filling!”

*Blessed are those who hunger
and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled!*

Thomas Merton says

that our yearning to please God,

does in fact please God.

And while we know

that without food and water

the body will die,

the flip side is,

hunger and thirst

are also signs of life.

Hunger and thirst are signs
that we are not willing to give up
on the life we have been given,
right here and right now.
And that is the concrete work of justice.

We will continue the pursuit for righteousness
because in working for justice
we find God's blessing and grace.

Friends no one knows more than Jesus
how supremely difficult it is
to live a life of righteousness.
Yet Jesus promises the blessing of his presence
to those who in their brokenness
and weakness nevertheless say,
"I'll die if I can't find a way
to please God and do what's right."⁴

And now friends, don't worry,
we are at the under *five-minute mark*
—it is not long until we eat and are satisfied.

⁴ Dave Peterson, <https://www.theologyofwork.org/the-high-calling/ill-die-if-i-dont>