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Pentecost 11

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Spiritually Hangry”

Text: John 6:22-35; Exodus 16:2-15; Ephesians 4:1-16

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Are you familiar with the word “hangry?” I’m guessing you are. That you’ve probably all heard it. You’ve probably all been it. You probably know what it means. It is the combination of two words: **hungry** and **angry**. And the official definition is *to be bad-tempered or irritable as a result of hunger*. And it doesn’t matter how old you are, whether you’re a one-year old or ninety years old. Everyone gets hangry.

And when you do, when you get hangry, how do you act? Maybe you snap at a loved one, taking your hanger out on them, even though they did nothing to cause it. Or maybe you grumble and complain, and find fault with everything. Nothing is good, nothing is right. Grrr! You’re not yourself. That’s how important food is to us.

Which God knew. That’s why in the beginning, when He created Adam and Eve, He put them in a Garden full of food. Everywhere they looked, everywhere they turned, food. Food that was good and nourishing . . . especially that one special tree in the middle, the Tree of Life. But of course, as you know, there was that other tree as well, that God said not to eat from. The tree that would not nourish, but kill. The tree that would not satisfy their hunger, but make them hangry. And when they ate it anyway, isn’t that what they became? Bad-tempered and irritable. Blaming each other, blaming God, no longer who God had created them to be.

And hangry is what the people of Israel became in the wilderness. We heard about that in the Old Testament reading. They were only two and a half months out of Egypt. *Two and a half months* after the ten plagues and the dividing of the Red Sea. You think they would remember all that and know that if their heavenly Father did that for them, took care of them and rescued them like that, then He wasn’t going to let them die of hunger in the wilderness! But they got hangry. They got irritable and bad-tempered. They grumbled and complained.

But God didn’t snap back at them. When you hear this account, from the Old Testament, as we did today, you get the impression - or at least I get the impression! - that God tells Moses that He is *now* going to do *what He was going to do all along, even before* the people began to grumble and complain. Feed them. Yes, He **heard their grumbling**, but

would He have not fed them anyway? Surely, He would have. He gave them meat to eat, and sent bread from heaven.

Now that's a great story, and 40 years of manna in the wilderness, God giving them their daily bread faithfully and reliably, is remarkable. But **Jesus raises the bar on that story today**. The Holy Gospel we heard today takes place after Jesus had fed the 5,000 men, plus women and children, out in that desolate place - kind of like the people of Israel in the wilderness. And the people want more. So they went looking for Jesus. But Jesus tells them not to seek this kind of food. ***Do not labor for the food that perishes***, He said, ***but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you***. Which the Son of Man has come to give to you; the plan all along.

Now, they *seem* a little hangry . . . not grumbling (yet!). But they do question Jesus about this a bit, maybe a little impatient with Him since He's not providing another free lunch! **And here's where Jesus raises the bar**. He didn't come to provide that kind of food, He says. There's another kind of food, another kind of bread, He has come to give them. Yesterday's lunch was just a sign of that; a pointer to this greater bread. The bread He has come to give them is bread which doesn't just satisfy hunger and take away the hangries, but is ***bread of life***. Bread which gives life. Life, like that one special tree in the Garden gave so long ago. Bread that is physical, *but also spiritual*. **To feed them spiritually**.

Because just as we can get hangry *physically*, did you ever consider . . . we can also get hangry *spiritually*. Just as we need nourishment in the body, so we need nourishment in the soul as well. And when we don't get it, we're not ourselves; we're not who God created us to be. *We get spiritually hangry*.

Now, when do you get hangry? You get hangry in the body when you don't eat, *or* when you don't eat right. Not all food is created equal. Eating a green jellybean is not the same as eating a green pea, even though both are little, green, and round! And even though donuts are my hands-down, all-time favorite kind of bread, that doesn't mean a diet of donuts is as good for me as eating whole grain breads. Eating poorly can be just as bad for you as not eating at all, and just as easily cause you to be hangry.

So what is the spiritual diet of our world today? Well, many do not eat at all. Never reading or hearing God's Word, never going to church. And then there are some who are just consuming spiritual junk food - a spirituality that tastes good and feels good, but doesn't satisfy our hunger; it only makes us hangry. And there's a lot of that out there. Books, videos, podcasts, churches, music . . . and people think that if it talks about Jesus, then it must be good. It's all the same.

But it's not. **It's green jellybeans and donuts**. And we can fall prey to it, too. And become spiritually hangry, too. Think about it. What does *spiritual hanger* look like in your life? And how did you get there? Not eating, or not eating enough, spiritually. Or

not eating the right spiritual food. And so you're not really being the Christian you ought to be, that you were baptized and born from above to be? *What does that look like in your life?* Maybe you're doing a lot of grumbling against God, like the people of Israel. Maybe a lot of passing the buck and blaming, like Adam and Eve. Maybe it's you holding a grudge and not being willing to forgive. Not repenting, but digging your heels in on your sin. Not believing God's Word, but following your own desires and opinions, and maybe even what the world says is good and right. Not willing to help and serve others. Not trusting God and His Word and His ways. Struggling with your prayers. And you know . . . things aren't right. Something's off.

Now, when that happens, what do you do? You can try to fix yourself - resolve to do better, try harder! But if you're like me . . . been there, done that. Maybe I can do better a little, and for a time, but it doesn't last; I fall back again, into bad habits, bad behaviours. Sometimes worse than before. So that's not the answer. *Better* is to eat regularly and nutritiously and a well-balanced diet, so your body has what it needs. So that you have what you need *spiritually*.

God provided that for the people of Israel with the **Tabernacle**, which He gave them just a few chapters after the story of the manna we heard today. That was to be the place where they would eat spiritually. The place of His words and promises, His forgiveness and life. So He took care of them body and soul. And **God has provided for you, too**. Not only giving you your daily bread, but also giving you a new Tabernacle - His Son. The body of Jesus being the *new* tent, or dwelling place, of God with us. So that Jesus could say (and I'm paraphrasing here!): ***I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not [be hungry], and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*** Which is to say, that by feeding on Jesus, a regular diet of His Word, His forgiveness, and His Body and Blood, we have all we need. For a Christ-like life *now*, a life of repenting, forgiving, serving, caring, praying, and loving; and a Christ-like life *for eternity*, a life of rest and glory.

This is the life of which Paul was speaking to the Ephesians today. An *unhungry* life ***worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*** And to achieve that, he says, God not only gave you the spiritual food you need, but men to give you that food as well. ***And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints*** (to feed you), ***for the work of ministry*** (to serve you), ***for building up the body of Christ*** (to nourish and strengthen you). So that we . . . ***grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.*** That we grow into His likeness, into His image. The image of the one who even laid down His life for us! Who went to the cross for us! To provide us with good food. The food and forgiveness we need. And growing into Christ can't happen with jellybeans and donuts! Or with the thoughts and opinions and advice of the world. *Only with the pure Word and Sacraments of God.*

So the question for today is: *how's your diet been?* Your spiritual diet, that is. Maybe not as regular and healthy as it should be? Maybe you're seeing the *spiritual hangries* pop-up in your life? Things not quite right? A little off? If so, come to the feast! Come and eat! Repent and **feast** on Jesus' forgiveness for all of your sins. Read and hear and **feast** of His Word, His good and healthful Word. Eat and drink and **feast** on the Body and Blood of Jesus. And not just once in a while, and not just once a week, but regularly, daily. **For here's the good news: what you do when you're hangry Jesus died for, and what Jesus died for is to take away your hangries.** Which is to say, Jesus died for your forgiveness, and His forgiveness gives you new life. That's what you need, and what Jesus is here to give. Or as the crowd said to Jesus that day, ***Sir, give us this bread always! This bread of life! Music to Jesus' ears!*** It's the very thing Jesus wants to do. For them. And **for you.**

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.