

## **“Everybody Has a Hungry Heart”**

August 30, 2020

Romans 12:9–21

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.”

Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

Ordinarily you would not associate St. Augustine, fourth-century Bishop of Hippo, and Bruce Springsteen. Separated by 1,700 years and, even more, by culture and profession, but they both said something similar and important.

St. Augustine: “Thou madest us for thyself, and our heart is restless until it reposes in thee.”

Bruce Springsteen: “Everybody has a hungry heart.”

Hungry, restless hearts. We are made that way: hungry, restless, with a need deep within us for something—some source of meaning, some ultimate, something to trust and live for. (John Buchannan)

I was flying back to MI from GA after my father's funeral in April. And not really in the mood for the conversation –

I was about to have with my seat mate (I was sitting on the aisle and she was sitting next to the window for covid-19 protection). She noticed my Bible on the tray. I was attempting to write a sermon. She said: are you a pastor?

I confess that I looked up, a little annoyed and murmured yes. Thinking she would realize I did not want to get into a long conversation.

She said: What kind? I said Presbyterian. Trying to keep it short. Then can I ask you a question? Sighing and feeling guilty, I said yes.

She goes on: What is Presbyterian? I tried to explain to her in a short version that I served in church that was Christian and committed to Jesus's mandate to love God, your neighbors as yourself.

She went on: Well, I am a spiritual person but not religious. Don't get me wrong. I believe in some kind of God or higher being, and I do yoga and pray. I try to help others and be a good person. Maybe I am Buddhist or something. But religion and church are just not for me. My family attends church. I am spiritual just not religious.

I am not sure what was going on with this young woman. But I do think she was hungry, restless, with a need deep within her for something—just like the rest of us - some source of meaning, some ultimate, something to trust and live for. Perhaps more than ever in these pandemics of racism, illness and death, destroyed homes lost jobs and unemployment. Who isn't looking for meaning?

I recently read that Americans are leaving organized religion in droves: they disagree with their churches on political issues; they feel restricted by dogma; they're deserting formal organizations of all kinds. Instead of atheism, however, they're moving toward an identity captured by the term "spirituality." Approximately sixty-four million Americans—one in five—identify as "spiritual but not religious.

They are rejecting organized religion but continue to believe in something larger than themselves. That "something" can range from Jesus to art, music, and poetry.

Religions look outside yourself to a higher power for wisdom and guidance, while a spirituality looks *within*, more personal and private spirituality.

But wherever you are coming from, there is an authentic hunger, that Bruce Springsteen and Augustine suggest, and also a new public willingness to do something about it.

Martin Marty concluded: “young people get tired of hearing that once upon a time people experienced God directly. They want it to happen for themselves. They don’t want to hear that Joan of Arc had visions.

They want visions. I expect that is true for everyone – no matter your age. Maybe that is why more people are out on the streets protesting racism, putting hero signs in their yards for essential workers.

Why professional sports team decide not to play ball -the upsurge in volunteering and donating money to food banks and helping to rebuild houses after storms.

We are searching for meaning and we want a new vision. Something worthwhile and bigger than ourselves.

“Religion is about what we believe and why we believe it. It is about the tradition, the institution. . .

It gives us creeds and dogmas and definitions of God. . . Spirituality is about the hunger in the human heart.

Howard Thurman said: To be spiritual is to be fully alive. He does warn how we can be so focused on individual expressions of life that we can miss its deepest reality— “the fact that life itself is alive.” Prayer “a radical response to life.”

What is the one essential attitude for an authentic spirituality? It’s an attitude that knows that “God is greater than religion” (p. 21). “We name God poorly and we name God only partially,” she says (p. 31).

That is what the story Moses and the burning bush is all about. It is about an ordinary person and his spiritual experience on a mountain top that lead him to do amazing things - what he thought was beyond his ordinary self.

It is not some great theology. It does not propose a theory about the existence of God. It is story about an ordinary person and how he experiences God and what he does next.

Moses, when he was a baby, was saved by Pharaoh’s daughter in a river. He was the cruel ruler of Egypt. He made it his mission to capture and kill

every boy child in the country. Worried they would rise up and take over his monarchy.

The story is when Moses grew up living in the king's place, he murdered a man who was beating up a slave. He ran for his life. We find him shepherding the flock of his father-in-law.

Exodus 3:1–15

He came to the mountain of God, Horeb. The angel of God appeared to him in flames of fire blazing out of the middle of a bush. He looked. The bush was blazing away but it didn't burn up.

Moses said, "What's going on here? I can't believe this! Amazing! Why doesn't the bush burn up?"

God saw that he had stopped to look. God called to him from out of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" Moses replied - "Yes? I'm right here!"

God said, "Don't come any closer. Remove your sandals from your feet. You're standing on holy ground."

Then he said, "I am the God of your father and mother. The God of Abraham and Sara, the God of Isaac and Rebecca, the God of Jacob and Leah."

Moses hid his face, afraid to look at God.

Then comes the plan.

"I have observed the misery of my people," the voice says. "I have heard their cry. I'm going to deliver them. And I'm going to send you to lead them out of their bondage."

It's time for you to go back: I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the People of Israel, out of Egypt."

Moses answers God, "But why me? What makes you think that I could ever go to Pharaoh and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

"I'll be with you," God said. "And this will be the proof that I am the one who sent you. When you have brought my people out of Egypt, you will worship God right here at this very mountain."

Of course, Moses doesn't want to go back to Egypt. He is safe and comfortable with his purpose. Why me?

What I am talking about is biblical spirituality. And it is not only a personal experience of God; but it comes with a strategic plan for your life. Perhaps meaning and a new vision, identity. But it doesn't stop with the mountain top.

God comes to people in the Bible, accosts people, interrupts stable and secure lives, not just to satisfy the spiritual hunger in their hearts but to give them a job to do.

The plan is - God wants Moses to be a liberator and Jeremiah to be a prophet. Jesus wants his disciples to feed 4000 people.

Spirituality comes with an assignment attached; a vocation not often welcome. Why me?

We know the tragedy of religion that is utterly certain that it knows the heart and nature and will of God. I do wish John Piper and Pat Robertson and the other self-appointed spokespersons for Christianity were a little less sure of themselves, a little less sure of God's politics, God's opinions on complex human issues; and lately the purpose of the corona virus is demons and God's wrath.

I wish so much that religious leaders would learn the grace to say, on occasion, "I don't know. I'm not sure about that."

Everyone has a hungry heart.

Our hearts are restless until they rest in God. Our spiritual search will take us to church sometimes, and sometimes, we will find God, or more probably be found by God, in unexpected places, ordinary places.

Moses, wasn't in church or synagogue. He wasn't behaving religiously, saying prayers, making sacrifices. He was doing his job, tending his sheep.

I believe that is how it happens—not exclusively when we are at church or even around your computers streaming worship services. But when we are out there, at work, at play, in our relationships, in our daily round, whatever it is. God interrupts. God comes. God speaks.

What we need is to be receptive and open. Joan Chittister suggests that our problem here is that we are divorced from nature, separated from nature's rhythms that across the centuries have reminded people of the mystery of God.

"We are human hamsters," she writes, "on a twenty-four-hour wheel. We work and run and talk at all times. The dark never overtakes us. The

silence of the day never sets in. And we wonder why we can never find God.

We are never still enough anymore to listen to the voice within that will tell us how" (p. 189).

I read that paragraph just last week, sitting out on my porch after the sun had drifted off into the clouds. It was quiet and I could begin to see a sliver of the moon - and it occurred to me that Chittister is right. You and I don't often have the silence and the empty time in which the hunger surfaces and our spirits open to God.

And it also occurred to me that God is present especially in the midst of these unnerving times, that questions everything we know about normality and justice.

And I believe this mysterious source of our being calls us to do something.

*Joan Chittister says: It is the seeking that counts. It's so easy to forget that simple truth in a capitalistic society that teaches us to win, have, amass, and define the best of us as the one who has the most of these things ...*

*But in the God-life, the seeing is itself the end. We never "get" God, but we always "have" God. We never "find" God. But we forever dwell in God.*

*So, if I'm seeking God, I have already come to God.*

May it be so for us. Amen.