

## Parched Souls

Psalm 63:1-8

When I was in junior high a girl my age from Canada moved in down the street from me. I had never known any Canadians and they kind of mystified me. On one hand, they seemed just like us; they could just as well have moved to my neighborhood from Indiana or the other side of Boulder. But every now and then their foreignness was stuck out. They had no interest in our beloved Broncos, preferring instead what seemed to me the even less-evolved sport of ice hockey. And when the talk around the water cooler was all about Watergate, they their attitude towards our political scene could only be described as something between bemused indifference and smug condescension. But what was most noticeable was that, even though we were both native speakers of English, their version of it was way cooler than ours. When dinner was over they scraped the scraps from their plate into the sink and down the garburator. And when we'd been out playing in the neighborhood all afternoon and needed a break, we would go into the kitchen and she'd ask me, 'what do you feel for?' What are you hungry for? What do you crave? What will satisfy you?

Those are the very questions that this psalm asks us: What do you feel for? What do you crave? It is all about hunger. Thirst. Longing. Now, it never asks us those questions directly because for the psalmist those aren't questions; he knows exactly what he craves, what he longs for. So while a lot of psalms can speak and pray for us, we understand exactly what the psalmist is going through, this one leaves most of us on the outside looking in, our noses pressed up against the glass, wondering what it would be like to live in the kind of world the psalmist lives in.

The fact is, I'm not even sure that most of us know that we are thirsty, that we are hungry. If you've ever been around someone who has gotten dehydrated you might have noticed that they didn't necessarily feel particularly thirsty. They may just feel irritable, or tired or generally unwell. And then they take Tylenol or lie down and rest, and wonder why they feel worse, and not better. I think that's what has happened to us. We have misread the signs. We know something is amiss, something isn't right. We feel vaguely restless, generally dissatisfied with the way things are; we know that we are discontent with ourselves and our lives, but we just can't put our finger on what the problems is. And then, like the person who is dehydrated but doesn't know it, we treat ourselves symptomatically. If we say, *something is missing*, then we fill our lives and our houses with all those things that must be missing. If we say *I'm really restless*, then we assume we are bored and fill our days with one exciting activity after another. If we say *I'm not just happy with myself*, then we set out to try to reinvent ourselves, to create the new me –or maybe just comfort and indulge the old me.

And guess what? Since we are treating symptoms, not the real problem, it doesn't get better. It probably even gets worse. So what do we do? We try harder. Ramp up our efforts. Listen to anyone who claims to have the fix, no matter how far fetched it is – stick needles full of botulism toxin into our faces for that ever-youthful look? You betcha. Pamper yourself with a master bathroom that's as big as our parent's first home?

Think how much better we'll feel with all that pampering. Get a 72" TV to watch The Biggest Loser on? The irony isn't lost on us, but if they really think it will make us feel better....

The sad part is, most of us never get to the point where we wake up one morning and see that we have lost complete control of our lives. Barbara Cawthorne Crafton writes with painful clarity about our excesses and desperation. Listen to this: "We didn't even know what moderation was. What it felt like. We didn't just work: we inhaled our jobs, sucked them in, became them. [We] stayed late, brought work home – it was never enough, though, no matter who much time we put in.....We ordered things we didn't need from the shiny catalogs that came to the houses: we ordered three times as much as we could use, and then we ordered three times as much as our children could use. We didn't just eat we stuffed ourselves. We redid the living room in which the furniture was not worn out, we threw away clothing that was merely out of style... We felt that it was important to be good to ourselves, and that meant that it was dangerous to tell ourselves no. About anything, ever. *I work hard*, we told ourselves. *I deserve a little treat*. We treated ourselves every day... [and when we began to feel uneasy] we looked for others whose lives were similarly overstuffed ; we found them. "This is just the way it is," we said to one another... "this is modern life."

"This is modern life." This is just how it is. We're stuffed and empty at the same time. We have gorged ourselves, but we are still not satisfied. Our houses and closets and garages and schedules are full to overflowing, our waistbands are bulging, but we are no better. Probably worse.

Crafton writes one other thing that helps shed some light on this, I think: "When did this collision between our appetites and the needs of our souls happen?" Appetite and hunger are two different things. What we have is a deep hunger, a thirst for something that will feed our souls, but we feed it like it is no more than a yen for junk food. We indulge in our wants and desires, but what is clamoring for our attention are our needs; the needs of our soul.

If this psalmist was in the business of asking outright questions, he might have asked us one more: What were you made for? Those voices that have so unhelpfully told us that that what we are after can be had with large screen TVs and new wardrobes and important jobs, they would say that we are made for self-fulfillment. To attain our fullest potential. To be self-actualized. To be all that we can be. To have all that we can have. Or, if they wanted to be more subtle they might simply say, contentment and happiness.

Augustine had another answer. We were made for God. No other reason. *You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our souls are restless until they find their rest in you.* Our souls are restless, until they find their rest in God. We weren't made to be perfect. We weren't made to be successful. We weren't made to be beautiful, or wealthy, or athletic. We were made for God's delight, and to be God's companion.

It isn't enough to just to swing in the opposite direction and become a part of a countercultural movement that rebels against consumerism and narcissism. The answer isn't just to resist all those voices that tell us that happiness comes from being on the cutting edge of technology and fashion and interior design. It isn't enough just to live simply; be content with what you have. That won't make the hunger go away. It won't satisfy your thirst. You can't reason them into submission or ignore them out of existence.

They are real, they are insistent, and they are there for a reason. They are like the smell of garlic wafting out on to the sidewalk from an Italian restaurant; they are there to lure us in. Suddenly whatever craving you had before for Mexican food or Chinese is gone; Italian is the only thing that will satisfy you. It has to be Italian. It is the same with that hunger, that thirst, that restlessness in us. It is built into us to drive us to God, for whom we were made, the only one who can satisfy us. As the old commercial for Coke implored us, 'obey your thirst.'