

Prpr 13 August 4, 2024 “You’re Not You When You’re Hungry”

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Sixteen years ago, in 2008, the makers of the *Snickers* candy bar had a problem. Their past television commercials had caused controversy and appealed to a very specific demographic, resulting in familiarity with their product but that familiarity did not translate into *Snickers* sales. People knew about the *Snickers* bar but were not reaching for it in stores.

That changed in 2010 during the Super Bowl when the first commercial in their new ad campaign aired. It started like many *Snickers* ads of the past, with a group of young men playing football. These men weren’t professional athletes, they were just playing for fun. However, one player was unexpectedly different and conspicuously stood out from the rest. It was none other than the late, great, actress Betty White dressed in light blue cotton slacks with a matching flowered shirt trying to catch a pass. After getting tackled, one of the young guys said to her, “Mike, you’ve been off all day. You’re playing like Betty White.” To which she responded by comically mouthing off. Then a young woman ran up and gave her a *Snickers* bar. Betty took a bit as the young woman asked, “Better?” and the camera cut to a young man who replies, “Better.” Then *Snickers*’ new slogan appeared on the screen: “You’re not you when you’re hungry.”

The ad did the trick. It turned *Snickers*’ reputation around, making it one of the best-selling candy bars ever. It was talked about the next day as the Super Bowl’s best television commercial, it won awards, and started an ad campaign featuring celebrity cameos with actors and singers like William Defoe, Robin Williams, Arthea Franklin, and Liza Minelli, to name a few, that represented the negative effects of being hungry with self-deprecating humor and made it easy for people from all walks of life to relate. Maybe you remember some of these ads. My favorite was the *Brady Bunch* ad with actor Danny Trejo as an aggressive Marsha Brady until satisfying her hunger with a *Snickers* bar.

What made those ads so relatable was the universal truth that being hungry can make anyone distracted, cranky, tired, irritable, making it difficult to participate in activities, programs, events, or just be part of life. The ads did not promise to make the world a better place or fix the problems of the world but with humor pointed out the value of satisfying immediate needs so a person can focus and be themselves.

The reality of universal hunger is nothing new. It appeared in today’s Gospel when the people in the crowd of thousands got up the day after Jesus fed them with a few loaves of bread and fish. While they had eaten their fill the day before, the satisfaction did not last long. Immediately, the crowd had tried to force Jesus to be their king, and he had mysteriously disappeared. The next day they seemed to realize he and his disciples were gone and weren’t coming back. So, they went looking for him, and all those thousands of people caught up with Jesus and they started a conversation about hunger.

John’s Gospel features important conversations that are about more than they appear. Like the conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, today’s conversation with a crowd is about something deeper than the first question they asked, and Jesus could tell what that deeper issue was. The woman at the well came for water, but had a much deeper thirst, the people in the crowd came because they were hungry. That hunger made them cranky, demanding, and forceful, but it is the kind of hunger that can’t be satisfied with all the bread, fish, or *Snickers* bars in the world.

Notice the conversation began with the question of when Jesus got to where he was. And Jesus did not answer that question. He didn’t say, “Oh, I got in sometime last night. I walked here, right over the water. Didn’t you see it?” Instead, Jesus seemed to cut to chase, insisting their question comes from their deep hunger, that they were looking for him because after eating their fill of bread and fish they had wanted to make him king. Perhaps because they believed if Jesus was their king, they would never go hungry again. A man with that kind of power could destroy rulers and easily feed nations even in draughts

and floods. Jesus point out to them satisfying their rumbling tummies did not magically return them to themselves, like in the *Snickers* commercials, so they could turn their attention to who Jesus is and recognize the types of things Jesus was doing were the types of things God does; things that ultimately bring life in the form of wholeness and wellness, renewing and restoring people so we can live the life God wants us to live. Instead, the people in the crowd seemed to greedily crave more; and in their greed missed or couldn't receive what was being given to them: the stuff of life.

One of the aspects of the *Snickers* "You're not you when you're hungry" campaign that I appreciate is how generous they are. In every humorous scenario, no one had to ask for the candy bar, someone who cares for the hungry person recognized the bad or selfish behavior was not personal. The person was not bad, they were hungry. And their friends, co-worker, spouse, partner, gave them what they needed: something to take away their hunger, restoring them to wholeness, so they could carry on doing whatever they were doing. No one ate the candy bar and then demanded more. Often the commercials ended with another celebrity cameo alerting us that another person was hungry, offering the opportunity to think about how we can share what we have and help others. There will always be needs, and once we realize or learn how to help fill those needs, we might feel empowered to do so, which brings us a little closer to God's love here on earth.

That is the deeper hunger Jesus was speaking to in today's Gospel. The hunger not for food, even if it is as tasty and filling as a *Snickers* bar, but the hunger for God's love that fills us in ways food does not. Love that is most satisfying when we give it away, the more we share it, the more there seems to be.

That is why Jesus calls himself the bread of life. Jesus does not mean life in the sense of breathing, consuming, and reproducing. Jesus means life in the in the deeper sense, sometimes we call it eternal life, or the Kingdom of God, the stuff of relationship with God and each other, the stuff of prayer, connection, renewal, wholeness, and creativity.

We get a taste of this Bread of Life when we receive Holy Communion. The point of Holy Communion is not to eat as much as can, it is to share in and participate in God's Love in Jesus. To receive Jesus not as an idea or a historical person, but as God's love and let that love nourish our souls and spirits, so that we can go back into the world, into our homes, neighborhoods, community, refreshed, renewed, restored, and give that same love away just as it was given to you.

When we notice the person who isn't themselves because they are hungry for love, we are being given the opportunity to share the love of God we have been given. There are many ways to share the love of God: by being patient, or generous by letting someone we can tell is in a hurry go ahead of us in line at the store, listening the person who is lonely, making room for a newcomer, giving someone a laugh when they need it, maybe even giving someone who didn't have time for lunch a candy bar, or a healthier alternative, are just a few ways anyone can embody the Love of God that Jesus embodies as the Bread of Life that restores all of us to who we are: beloved children of God. Imagine what the world would be like if we all shared that kind of love, that stuff of life, that restores everyone to who they are. Maybe those larger issues of injustice that lead to unnecessary suffering might be whittled down and God's kingdom might come even closer.

The next time you see a *Snickers* candy bar, you might remember not only do we all share a hunger, we can also share the love of God in Jesus who is the stuff of life that restores us to who we are, because you're not you when you're hungry.