

## “Satisfying Our Hunger: Becoming Friends with God”

### 2 Corinthians 5: 14-20

This sermon has not been the easiest to write. There is so much going on in this text that all week, I’ve wondered where do we start? We could go in so many directions with this Scripture that I honestly felt paralyzed when it came to writing the sermon.

Or at least that was what I told myself all week. About mid-week, I came to the realization that my real reason for paralysis in not writing this sermon was that this text was asking some pretty hard questions of us as people of faith, questions that we would probably rather ignore than answer.

I knew that I could take the easy way out with this sermon and preach the “universal” message: Christ died for all, we are all God’s children, yea God! But, that didn’t seem quite right. Don’t get me wrong. I totally believe that, but as I tried to force my thoughts in that direction, the Spiritual paralysis became even more pronounced.

It was only when I took a step back and admitted a few things did I feel like God’s word was speaking to me.

Let me explain:

We live in a world where people hunger for healing. We live in a world where people hunger for reconciliation. We live in a world where people hunger for wholeness. No one denies that, but sometimes I wonder if we as humankind would rather starve from our need for reconciliation than actually taking the steps to have that hunger satisfied.

And this wondering of my mind came to life on Thursday morning this past week. On Thursday I found myself in the big city of Frankfort at the Governor's Prayer Breakfast. It should have been a great time and it was except...maybe it was just me, but underneath the ecumenical nature of the event laid a sense of division, an intentional sense of division that seemed to overshadow the purpose of the breakfast. Sure the words were all there: phrases like "Let's work together so that all Kentuckians can succeed." Phrases like "Connect in community." Phrases like "We all have a common goal." But there was tension in the room.

The emcee made jokes, but no one laughed. Now, disclaimer, I don't know if the jokes just weren't that funny. Or the fact that the breakfast started at 7:30 a.m. and the convention center ran out of coffee, but the fact was that no one laughed. The whole event was odd and out of place. It honestly felt like people were going through the motions, saying the right things and I couldn't help but notice that after the final benediction, there seemed to be an audible sigh in the

room, almost like everyone was saying, “ Well, Thank God, that’s over. Let’s get back to work. Let’s get back to forcing my agenda.”

Now again, another disclaimer. I know there is a political game and I don’t play it well at all. I also know that I am making a quick judgment based on 5 minutes of interaction but as I watched bankers, politicians, ministers and community officials stream out of the Frankfort Convention Center, I couldn’t help but think of the brokenness of our relationships in the world and how it seems that we would rather hold on to this human-made brokenness as ways to define ourselves and divide ourselves than find ways to work together and claim the things we have in common. As I watched people entrusted to find ways to work together stream quickly out of the auditorium, I couldn’t help but think that it seems like humankind takes some sort of pride in lifting up the things that divide us, lifting up the things that separate us. It seems like we would rather starve than admit we need each other and begin satisfying our hunger for healing and wholeness.

Now I know that I am treading into some dangerous territory here. Please don’t hear me say that I think we all have and carry around with us a victim’s mentality. Instead, what I am saying is that it seems as if we need to have this brokenness embedded into our relationships just so we can function as a society. We need to have the “others” in our lives because ultimately we want someone to

blame, someone to point our fingers at when there are problems. We want the others in our lives to say they, nameless and faceless, hurt us and we can't forgive them. Almost like we have honed our brokenness to an art form and that's the hunger we would rather feed than finding ways to come together for healing and wholeness.

Well, since you haven't gotten up and left yet and since I know I am treading into dangerous territory, I might as well make it all worth our while by continuing with this line of thought and extending it to our relationship with God as well.

I'm going to go out on a limb and say that our relationship with God is just as broken as all the other relationships we have in our lives. Not because of anything God has done but because of what we've done, because of what we have said, because of the role that we have placed upon our God. I think that as people of faith we are as close to God as we choose to be. We are as close to God as we choose to be. I'll let that one sink in for a while.

As people of faith, we like keeping God at a distance. Sure we say that God is everywhere but do we really invite God to be a part of our lives every day in every way? Are there only certain moments, certain times that we allow God in?

That we invite God in? Do we treat God more like a casual acquaintance than our friend?

You see, these are the questions that I hoped to avoid. These were the questions that I wasn't sure I wanted to answer for myself, let alone for us as a community of faith.

As I started thinking about our relationship with God as people of faith, I couldn't help but notice a pattern. It seems like from the very beginning, we as people of faith have kept God at a distance. We've used language like keeping God at a distance is for our protection. We can never really understand God so why bother trying. Or we've said that God was an angry God and then set up rules and regulations around our worship to uphold that fact. We offered sacrifices and prayers, hoping that they would satisfy God and then once satisfied, God would go away again until we needed something or wanted something.

And just to make sure that God was kept at a distance from us, we have even gone as far as saying that God requires certain things from us for our relationship to work. No one likes being required to do things in relationship. Relationships should be based on mutual trust, mutual love. We are in relationships because we want to be in them not because things are required of us. We know that's not how they work. In our own lives, we don't go around saying to our friends, to our

families, to our significant others, I require you to obey me. I require you to wash the dishes all the time. I require you to clean the house every Friday. We don't go around saying, if you do all these, up to my standards, then and only then will I be in relationship with you. Well, we may try, but I don't think that relationship would last very long.

If we tried to require things of others before we would be in a relationship with them, people would look at us like we were crazy and simply say, No thank you. Or in response to our list of demands, they may give us their own list of demands to which we could say, "See I tried. I tried to be in a relationship with that person but that person doesn't compromise. That person is unreasonable. That person doesn't even try to play nice with others."

We don't do this with each other so why do we do it with God? I think for the simple reason once again, we can say Well, it is all God's fault. God is manipulative. God is distant. God is angry. God is only good for getting us what we want. We can still hold onto our illusions that we are in control and it is God who has the problems, not us. We can still hold onto our divisions and separations as a way of avoiding the real issue at hand.

From the beginning of time, we as people of faith have kept God at a distance. We have used excuse after excuse to only allow God in so much. We

have said that God was the problem, not us. We have even said that it was all God's fault, that God hurt us in the past and we can't forgive God. By doing all these things we have been allowed to hold onto to the things that divide us and separate us. We have been able to avoid the issues and in doing so have starved ourselves rather than letting healing and wholeness happen.

Let's face it: This is the type of religion and faith that we have been practicing as the Church for the simple reason, it is easy for us. It made things less complicated for us. We can keep God at a distance and only approach God when we need something, when we want to something. And the other benefit, we can keep each other at a distance and see people as something to be used.

This type of thinking and being and relating has allowed us to have the illusion that we control God. It has allowed us to have the illusion that we always have the upper hand. And unfortunately all it has ever done for God is to paint God in a less than favorable light.

But when we look back and read the Biblical story from God's point of view, we get an entirely different story. We see that God has never been distant. God has tried every which way to get our attention but we have held God at arm's length. When we read the Biblical story from God's point of view, we realize that God has held true to God's promises, that God is loving, that God is faithful to all

generations, that God is steadfast. We see that God gets frustrated with the people of God time and time again because we, not God, we have embedded our divisions so much into our relationships that we don't know what to do with God's love and grace. So we decided to ignore it and not extend it to others.

Yes, God called us a stiff neck people but can we really blame God for that? Every time God has tried to be in relationship with us, we have rebuffed God. We have chosen the easy way, the less complicated way, the way that allows us to forget our responsibilities towards God and towards each other.

In our relationship with God, we've been the ones who have been unreasonable. We've been the ones who have not compromised. We are the ones who told God it is our way or the highway. God wanted more but we decided to treat God more like our casual acquaintance than to actually be in a real authentic relationship with God.

We have kept God at a distance and now, starving for healing and reconciliation, we realize that we are as close to God as we have chosen to be. We are as close to God as we have chosen to be.

That's what's so powerful about Paul's words. He turns the tables back on us. He knows that reconciliation isn't a familiar term for us. It rarely appears in the

bible and when it does, it is a result of human action, us trying to mend fences with God so that God will go away until we need God again.

What Paul says in our text is that we have been thinking about our relationship with God all wrong. God's the one who has been doing all the reconciling. God's been the one trying to be in relationship with us. God's been the one trying to show us how much we mean to God even to the point that God gave God's only son for us.

Paul tells us that we are that precious to God. That's how much God desires to be in a loving and fulfilling relationship with us. God's been doing all the work all along and now it is up to us to let go of our divisions and embrace the love and grace of God.

Or let me say it this way. We've always been comfortable with giving names and certain roles to God. Father, Creator, Giver, Redeemer, maybe even Judge and Master but one title we have never been comfortable with when it came to our relationship with God was Friend. We as people of faith have never really embraced God as our friend. Not because we can't think of God in that role but because we are uncomfortable with that title being applied to God because friendship with God would mean a lot from us.

Think about it. Friendship takes time and attention. Friends care about what is important to the other person. Friends spend time together. Friendship means being there when no one else is.

Paul tells us that God has always been our friend but we have not been very good friends with God. All because we are as close to God as we have chosen to be. We are as close to God as we want to be.

What would happen if we became friends with God? We might have to start caring about what God cares about: you know all of God's children, you know all of God's creation. We might have to spend time with God and give more attention to God, more than just an hour on Sunday mornings. We might have to learn about God's true nature, not just have our illusions about God. We might, heaven forbid, find out that we were wrong about God and admit our mistakes.

Making friends with God could really complicate our lives....It might help us become the people that God created us to be.

By making friends with God, we can begin to put aside our divisions and experience the goodness of God's love and grace in every moment of every day of our lives and in doing so, we can begin to extend that grace and love to others.

Making friends with God could really complicate our lives. It might mean making us looking at the world differently and realizing that everyone has value, that everyone is created in the image of God.

I don't know, making friends with God could really complicate our lives. We might have to start becoming partners with God in bringing about reconciliation and peace.

It is going to take time and attention. It is going to mean that we spend time with God. It is going to mean that we might have to let go of our illusions, to get to know people and see them as a child of God.

Becoming friends with God could really complicate our lives. The love of Christ might just take over and make this world a better place.

God is already our friend. Are we ready to become friends with God?

May we always embrace the life giving and the life transforming complications that go along with becoming God's friends. Amen.

