

“What Do 852 Million People Have in Common?”

John 6:35

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

Smoke Rise Baptist Church

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Communion Devotion

What do 852 million people around the world have in common? They go to bed hungry each night. In the 125 developing countries throughout the world, six million children die each year from hunger related causes. This means one child dies every five seconds. Do you realize that 720 children will die during our time in worship this morning? That’s a sobering thought.

In the United States, 14 million children live in households where they have to skip meals or eat less to make ends meet. At the 2005 Conference of US Mayors, it was reported that requests for emergency food assistance increased 12% and 40% of those requests came from people that were employed!

How do we reconcile these appalling statistics with Jesus’ words in John 6:35? “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Some answer by stating that Jesus was talking in spiritual terms not physical. This is not to be taken literally.

I don’t doubt there is a strong spiritual dimension to his words. However, I am not willing to stop there. I think he was also talking about physical nourishment as well as spiritual.

All throughout the New Testament’s account of Jesus’ earthly ministry, it is clear his mission focused upon both the eternal and the present. Not only was he concerned about obvious spiritual needs and our being in right relationship with God, but he was equally active in meeting the physical needs of those around him.

Nowhere is this better seen than John 6. Jesus fed the multitudes with a young boy’s lunch of loaves and fish and used this to focus upon the need for spiritual nourishment. I sense in this chapter as well as many others a mandate for Christians to be involved in ministries that meet basic human needs. People’s lives are at risk due to economic hardships, lack of job skills, famine, floods and earthquakes and we need to help them. As Bono, the lead singer for U2 and a spokesperson for the ONE Campaign said, “Where you live should not determine whether you should live.”

So what did Jesus mean when he said, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty?” How do we reconcile these words with global poverty? Did Jesus really believe that it was possible for everyone to have enough food to eat?

I think he did. Why? **I think he believed that no one would go to bed hungry because his followers would not allow this to happen.** They would hear the cries of the poor and not turn a deaf ear. They would share their resources, not hoard them. They would simplify their lifestyles rather than ignoring the plight of the hungry to feed their insatiable desires. They would become advocates for the oppressed, creating a world built upon economic and social justice.

Why did he think his disciples would do this? They would see the sacrifices he would make in order to help others and follow suit.

Is it unreasonable to think that Jesus believed that his death on the cross would inspire his disciples to make sacrifices in order to meet people's basic needs? I don't think so. He had too much confidence in the power of his example and our willingness to be like him.

As we gather around this table today, rich with the symbols of sacrificial love, let us come in a spirit of humility and gratitude. May our hearts overflow with gratitude for the food on our tables and roofs over our heads. May we leave this table, however, aware of the countless numbers that go to bed hungry and our responsibility as Christians to use our vast resources to feed them. May we live up to the confidence Jesus has in us to create a world where everyone has the opportunity to work and the skills to perform a job.

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty?" What do you need to do to make our Lord's dream come true? Do you need to become more aware of the plight of the poor? October, World Hunger Awareness month, is a good time to do this. October 16 is World Food Day, a worldwide event designed to increase hunger awareness so that steps can be taken to alleviate it. Perhaps you need to get more information and sit down with your family to talk about ways you can make a difference.

On a local level, do you need to become a more faithful supporter of the Stone Mountain and Lilburn Cooperatives so that the hungry people around us are fed? Think about this as we share the bread and cup this morning, reminding us of our need to focus upon the eternal and the present.

Jesus believed that no one would go to bed hungry because his followers would not let this happen. Was he right?