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## *'Famished Cravings' vs the Life that Satisfies*

A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Thee Smith  
Proper 13 – Year B

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord my strength and our redeemer. Amen. (Psalm 19.14; paraphrase)

Several years ago in 2009 the comedian, Louis C.K., gave his popular comments on modern life that have now gone viral on the internet. You can watch the video on YouTube where he appeared on the Conan O'Brien late night talk show. Just google the following key phrase and you'll find dozens of sites: it's the punch line, "Everything's amazing and nobody's happy." Here are some excerpts that you may find amusing. (By the way, to pull this off I'm going to need to project the tone of a philosophical rant.)

Everything is amazing right now and nobody's happy. Like, in my life time the changes in the world have been incredible. When I was a kid we had a [rotary phone](#). We had a phone that you had to stand next to and you had to dial it ... Do you realize how [primitive](#) that is? You are making [sparks](#) ... in the phone. And you actually would hate people with zeros in their number 'cause it was more [dialing]! "Oh this guy's got two zeros in his number! ... And then if they called and you weren't home the phone would just ring, lonely, by itself.

And then if you wanted money you had to go IN the bank, when it was open for like three hours, you had to stand in line, write yourself a check like an [idiot](#) and then when you ran out of money you'd just go "Well, I just can't do anymore things now." ... That was it. And even if you had a credit card, the guy would go "Oh!" and ... he'd have to call the president to see if you [really] had any money.

And here talk-show host Conan O'Brien asks: "Do you feel that we now, in the twenty-first century, we [take technology for granted](#)?" To this question Louis replied:

Well yeah, 'cause now we live in an amazing, amazing world and it's wasted on...[a] generation of [spoiled](#) idiots that just don't care. Because this is what people are like now, they've got their phone and they are like "uuuhhh... it won't [work right away...]" Give it a second! It's going to [space](#)! Can you give it a second to get back from space?! Is the [speed of light](#) too slow for you?

... I was on an airplane, and there was internet, high speed internet on the airplane. This is the newest thing that I know exists. I'm sitting on the plane and they go "Open up your [laptop](#) and you can go on the internet, and it's fast and I'm watching YouTube clips! It's amazing, I'm in an airplane. And then it [breaks down](#) and they apologize that the internet isn't working and the guy next to me [complains]!" Like how quickly the world owes him something he knew existed only ten seconds ago ...

Flying is the worst one, because people come back from flying and they tell you their story, and it's like a horror story. They act like their flight was like a [cattle car](#) in the 40's in Germany, that's how bad they make it sound. "It was the worst day of my life! First of all we didn't board, for 20 minutes. And then we got on the plane and they made us sit there, on the [runway](#), for 40 minutes! We had to sit there!" Oh really? What happened next? Did you fly... through the air... incredibly?! Like a bird? Did you [partake](#) in the [miracle](#) of human flight you non-contributing [zero](#)? You're

flying! It's amazing. Everybody on every plane should just constantly be going "OH MY GOD! WOW!" You're flying! You're sitting in a chair... In the sky!

... See, here's the thing! People say there's [delays](#), delays on flights. Delays? Really? New York to California in five hours. That used to take 3 years to do that! And a bunch of you would die on the way there, and have a baby. You'd be with a whole different group of people by the time you got there! Now you watch a movie ... [have a snack] and you're home (accessed 8/2/2015 at [www.ethansenglishcafe.com/everythings-amazing-but-nobodys-happy/](http://www.ethansenglishcafe.com/everythings-amazing-but-nobodys-happy/)).

So that's a humorous perspective from one of our most popular comedians also turned philosopher! But it also connects with our gospel theme today about living the life that really satisfies us. By contrast even our epistle reading appointed for today exhorts us as follows (and here I abbreviate): we are exhorted to come "to maturity, to the measure of the full stature ... [and] no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind ... [but] grow up in every way" (Ephesians 4:13-15). Let's spend a few minutes today 'connecting-the-dots' between such scriptures appointed for today and our modern tendency to feel massively dissatisfied despite how amazing things are.

An English vicar has described today's gospel as the experience of people wanting so much what they think Jesus offers that they remain dissatisfied and can't get enough of him. "[He has given us so much—that we want him to give us more.](#)" By contrast we have that classic George Herbert prayer for gratitude, "[God, you have] given me so much ... Give me one thing more, a grateful heart." (The Temple, 1633; accessed 8/2/2015 at [www.ccel.org/h/herbert/temple/Gratefulness.html](http://www.ccel.org/h/herbert/temple/Gratefulness.html)). On gratitude as the tonic for satisfaction and even happiness, see this commentary on Louis C.K.'s rant quoted above: <http://time.com/2859742/how-to-live-a-happy-life-louis-ck-explains-the-science/> accessed 8/2/2015.) The opposite of such gratitude is the phenomenon that Vicar John Davies calls a "famished craving." He borrows the expression from theologian, Gil Bailie who, in turn, borrows it from the poet, T.S. Eliot. Famished craving works like a kind of eating disorder, where the more you try to satisfy it the more you need. Indeed, the very act of trying to satisfy the craving famishes—makes you more desperately hungry for it—all the more. In that connection what our scriptures point to today is not a food or appetite disorder but rather an entire life disorder. It's throughout our entire lives that we experience a famished craving for the fullness of life when we can't find satisfaction in the ways we live our lives.

Vicar Davies comments next: "It's a disorder which to some extent traps us all." And then he adds:

And it's [also] about the way we crave the attention of others around us too – the famished cravings we have for people close to us who we perhaps rely on too much to help us and fulfil us, people who we unhealthily depend on to do things for us, and even when they do those things for us we then very soon find ourselves asking them to do something more.

Now here's the challenge for committed Christians too! Even where we look to Jesus instead of the other people to satisfy our needs and desires—even so are we seeking the things that truly satisfy or rather the same kinds of things that leave us with more "famished cravings?" Again, Vicar Davies comments:

A lot of Christians, sadly, are like this - relying on the next new project, the next new mission, the next exciting new Christian song or book or DVD, the new vicar or new leader, or new kind of worship service or new community project, to keep their faith alive.

But Paul's concern is that we should become mature Christians - that we become fully human in Christ. And this means putting away our famished cravings with these sorts of people and things, and instead feeding ourselves with the bread of life, learning to give our heads and hearts over to Jesus and to him alone. (John Davies, "John 6: The Famished Craving and the Bread of Life;" accessed 8/1/2015 at [www.johndavies.org/sermons/gs\\_09\\_08\\_02.html](http://www.johndavies.org/sermons/gs_09_08_02.html))

Well, Christian friends, what would that mean for us today? What would it mean for us to overcome our insatiable desire for the fullness of life by "learning to give our heads and hearts over to Jesus and to him alone?"

The fifteenth century mystical doctor, St. John of the Cross, taught that we are spiritually incapable of achieving this reorientation on our own. Instead God's self must provide the only remedy that works. This remedy is that 'dark night of the soul;' a time of spiritual deprivation that can occur not just once but at various times in our lives. It is in our spiritual dark nights that we learn to really rely on God alone instead of relying on our own spiritual abilities or even the spiritual things of God.

John of the Cross insisted that if God did not take away our ability to enjoy spiritual things like Bible study, prayer and worship, and other forms of religious fellowship or fulfillment, we would continue to pursue all those things in an all-to-natural and even hedonistic or avaricious way. So God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves, drying up our pleasure and delight in spiritual things so that we are no longer driven by our natural needs and desires but by our desire for God alone.

One of our contemporary spiritual teachers, Mirabai Starr, in her recent book on the 'Dark Night,' even offers a prayer that God would send us such a dark night so that we may learn to rely on God alone and not the spiritual things of God.

"In the dark night, [she says with John of the Cross], the secret essence of the soul that knows the truth is calling out to God: Beloved ... Plunge me into the darkness where I cannot rely on any of my old tricks ... Let me give up on trying to convince myself that my own spiritual deeds are bound to be pleasing to you. Take all my juicy spiritual feelings, Beloved, and dry them up ... Take my lofty spiritual concepts and plunge them into darkness ... Let me love only you, Beloved. Let me quietly and with unutterable simplicity just love you." (Mirabai Starr, *Dark Night of the Soul, St. John of the Cross*; Riverhead Books: 2002, p.10; quoted in ["Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation" for July 31, 2015](#) accessed 8/1/2015)

Now most of us need a spiritual guide or director to coach us through such an experience; so that we stay the course and come out the other side—again and again! How fortunate we would be to find such a guide as the popular spiritual writer, Richard Rohr, who recently offered the following in his online "Daily Meditations: "

In the dark night of the soul, the only thing left to do is to let go of the ego's need...and simply turn our attention toward God. There is no need any longer to achieve or manufacture our union with God. (["Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation" for July 31, 2015](#) accessed 8/1/2015)

Here let me elaborate just a bit on Fr. Rohr's last remark: "There is no need any longer to achieve or manufacture our union with God"—and here I would add—even "our union with God." Instead, let us practice letting go of achieving even "our union with God," *as if* it were another insatiable, addictive, and unquenchable case of our ego's famished cravings. And let us not ask the ego-driven question that the crowd asks in today's gospel, when they said to Jesus, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" (John 6:28) Rather, let it be for us as Jesus says to them: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

Belief, not our works, is the gospel mandate for the life that truly satisfies us. Instead of trying to find satisfaction and fulfillment even in the works of God, Jesus calls us to simply believe on him, and therein to rely on "my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven." And where today's gospel crowd says to him, "Sir, give us this bread always," let us hear him also say to us:

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (John 6:28-29; 32-35)

Thus may we no longer strive to make him our 'bread of life,' but simply rely on him to be our bread of life. And so will we not experience even God with famished cravings, as we rely on God to "give us this bread always." For it is God alone who makes us "never be hungry," and "never be thirsty."

In the name of God: "*Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.*" Amen!

—"O Worship the King," *The Hymnal*, 1982; no. 388, stanza 5 (NY: Church Hymnal Corp., 1984)