

MATTHEW 5:6
A HEALTHY APPETITE!

What's your passion in life? Is there one thing, more than any other, which drives you on? This passion can be all kinds of things; whatever it is, it is our goal in life; it takes priority over everything else; the rest of life has to fit round about this passion! Other things will be pushed to one side, but not this! What is it? It might be the pursuit of wealth; it might be the ambition to get to the top of the tree at work; it might be family and the desire to have a happy family life, with your children or grandchildren; it might be sport, that you are driven to achieve the fastest time, or even to see your team win as many games as possible! Whenever there is a choice, the passion wins out; you never give it a second thought, but the passion rules the day and everything else has to take second place.

Is Christian faith that passion? There is something in our culture that is nervous of that kind of faith-based passion; we're not always sure that it is such a healthy passion. It is easier to keep 'religion' at arms length, with Jesus as someone to be admired from a distance; we're not always sure that we like people to become passionate about the faith. Yet, in the values that Jesus teaches His disciples to live by, He says "*Blessed are...*" (*Matthew 5:6*) The Beatitudes are eight qualities of the Christian disciple; these are not eight groups of people, but eight qualities of the one group and so these are qualities to which we are meant to aspire. Jesus wants us to be hungry and thirsty for something, with a longing, a yearning, a passion. The person who has this proper passion, or hunger, will be satisfied.

"*Blessed are...*" (*Matthew 5:6*) "Righteousness" is a Bible word that is used in three different ways: first of all, it is used to describe our right relationship with God: we have fallen out with God and God has fallen out with us, but Jesus has died and is raised, God has forgiven our sins and has declared us 'righteous' people; this is the gospel; because our sins are forgiven and we are right with God, the relationship is restored; righteousness is the word that is used to describe that restored relationship. Secondly, it is used to describe right kind of living: we learn to be the right kind of people, having the right kind of qualities, doing the right kind of things, making the right kind of choices for the day-to-day living of our lives and our character and conduct please God; righteousness is the word that is used to describe this right kind of living. Thirdly, we have a concern to see right done in all of society: call it justice, or a deep concern to see people treated well and injustice and evil come to an end, a concern to build fair and just communities; righteousness is the word used to describe that concern. All three of these are linked and connected in the Bible and our right living and our concern for justice are built around and stem from our right relationship with God. For Jesus, this is to be our passion, our longing, our yearning, the quality for which we are hungry and thirsty.

Paul had spent his life hungry for righteousness, but he discovered that there is a bad way to search for righteousness and a better way. He describes the change in Philippians chapter 3. To begin with, he thought that righteousness is something to achieve by doing, almost like ticking boxes: there is a box marked upbringing – he is circumcised and the box is ticked; there is a box marked heritage – his family and his ancestors, and the box is ticked; there is a box marked 'here's what I have done', keeping the rules and regulations of his religion and doing it faultlessly and with great zeal, and the box is ticked. Later, he came to see that the total of all these boxes is – zero, nothing; even less, he now sees all of that as rubbish! His way of thinking changed when he met Jesus and Jesus gave him a new life and a new outlook on life. Righteousness is now a gift, something Jesus gives to us, a free gift and the gift is ours when we connect with Jesus through faith. This is the "*surpassing greatness*" of

which he writes. This is the better way; this is now about our relationship with God, about the grace and love of Jesus. This complete change in the way in which he saw the world, changed Paul's life completely. Now, he is hungry and thirsty to know Jesus more, to grow in faith, to deepen his understanding of Jesus, because in Jesus is his life.

"You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you". This is the famous insight on human life by Augustine, the fourth century father of Church. He described the God-shaped hole that in the human spirit that can only be filled by God, through faith in Jesus. Augustine discovered that life found its meaning and purpose in relationship with God, being connected with Jesus. This is same passion that Jesus wants to see in His disciples; this is same passion as Paul described in his new life, pressing on to know Jesus better. This is the challenge for us as disciples of Jesus: is this the main passion of our lives, that we know Jesus better, that we grow in our faith? Passion is the driving-force of our lives: lots of people will tell you that faith is a good thing, that church is a good thing; their head tells them that. But passion for the faith and the church doesn't exist in their gut, so they do nothing about it; or there are bigger passions that crowd out faith. Here is the challenge for us: knowing Jesus is to be the great passion of our lives and to grow in that faith, so that we are hungry to know Jesus better.

Hunger and thirst is all about appetite. When our grandson, who is nearly 5 months old, is hungry, the whole house knows about it; he lets you know that he needs fed. We are happy to answer that cry and feed him, because we know that without that healthy appetite and without food, he won't grow and develop in a good and healthy way. Christians should have an appetite for faith and for growing faith. The only way for faith to grow is to feed it. We feed faith by reading the Bible and knowing God through the pages of the Bible. We feed faith when we pray, learning to trust God and seeing something of His goodness and grace in answered prayer. We feed faith by coming to Church and encountering God in worship and being supported by other Christians. We feed faith in the communion service which shows us something of Jesus in the tangible bread and wine. Faith can't grow without feeding; it does depend on size of our appetite.

There is a bond between us and Jesus. He satisfies our souls with all kinds of good things and promises to love and care for us endlessly. The bond from our part is created by our faith in Jesus. Communion feeds that bond. The bread and wine remind us of what Jesus has done for us, especially in His death and resurrection, that Jesus has died to take away our sins and restore our relationship with God; these elements remind us of the deep love that Jesus has for us that led Him to sacrifice Himself in this way. As we take the bread and wine, we celebrate the bond that Jesus has created; as we take the bread and wine we also have the opportunity to reaffirm our faith, our part in that bond and to give ourselves afresh to love, trust and serve Jesus in our lives. This is not just an individual thing: passing the bread and wine from one to another reminds us that there is also a bond between us, a bond of shared faith, of shared passion for knowing Jesus.

Where does our passion lie? What spiritual appetite do we have for knowing Jesus and for growing that faith? Any? There was a time when communion could be seen as ticking a box: "I brought my card, my name is ticked off, my membership of the club is assured for next 12 months!" Is that hunger for righteousness in the wrong way? The "*surpassing greatness*" is in knowing Jesus, is being hungry for this right relationship with God, is being passionate to become the right kind of people; is about longing to see right prevail in the world. This is what Jesus wants us to be; to be hungry for these qualities and values. "*Blessed are...*" (*Matthew 5:6*)