"More Than This"

I have been thinking about what motivates us in our daily lives and in the arc of our existence. My pondering was prompted by the first line of today's psalm. "As the deer longs for the water-brooks." It is a beautiful and poignant image, but it also begs the question, "What is longing?". It seems to me that there is a continuum of longing in our lives. Specifically, we have needs, wants, and desires. I am not an anthropologist or psychologist, so I may not have these categories just right. But let me give it a shot.

In the hierarchy I mentioned, needs are the most basic aspects of life. Every creature has these needs. Abraham Maslow, in his hierarchy of needs, indicated that these are the needs for air, water, food, clothing, shelter, and sleep. These are the very aspects of life that we must have to survive from day to day. There is no doubt that if we do not have them, we will perish; they are that essential. However, if these are all we have in life, we are only existing or subsisting. Someone in this condition does not have time to seek education, art, music, maybe even procreation. It is only when basic needs are met that a person can set aside time for something more complex.

Maslow says the next level of needs is safety and security. He says this category includes health, employment, property, family, and social ability. We can see how that first level has to be secure before we can begin to attend to these areas. Without the basics covered, we are not going to have time or energy for a job, creating and maintaining as a family, obtaining and maintaining property, maintaining our health, or having more than basic social interactions.

Now my hierarchy diverges from Maslow. He continues to talk about needs and I want to segue to wants. Once we have our basic needs of life fulfilled, we get into wants. Wants are defined as something lacking in life. They are not necessities in the same ways that show up in Maslow's first two stages. They are not life and death, but they are reasonable and obtainable. I can express the want for an apple. That is both reasonable and obtainable, but it is not a necessity per se. If I want new clothes, that is not an expression of necessity, but a wish for something within the possibility of gaining. We see that wants express a wish for something that is not essential, but also not pie in the sky.

The next category is desires. Now, wants and desires seem very similar. Indeed, dictionaries often define want with the word desire, but I propose that desires are significantly different from wants. Desires are more deeply felt. They go beyond the want of an apple or clothes. There is an emotional component of a desire that is not part of a want. I think of the phrase about something being "your heart's desire." To desire something implies that there is something we long for that is unfulfilled and potentially life-changing.

There is one more stage in this hierarchy of wanting that I want to add. That is longing or yearning. These aspects of need are like the desires of the most profound type. To long for something is to desire it beyond ourselves. It is more than thinking; it will be life-altering. Rather, we know that it will change everything. Something we yearn for is actually something we need both at the most basic level and the most intense and elevated level.

Hear how the psalmist compares the deer's longing for water to his own longing for God, when he writes:

"As the deer longs for the water-brooks, *
so longs my soul for you, O God."

We see the soul's longing for God as something higher up the ladder of needs from water. We have the get those basic needs of food, shelter, and safety fulfilled before we can start pondering our relationship with God. Don't you think? But the psalmist uses this comparison between the deer's longing for water and his for God to make an important statement. His longing for God is as essential as the deer's longing for water. To him, water and God are both essential for life. Without either one of these, we will perish.

Our heart and body know that life without either is no life at all. One fulfills the body's basic need for hydration, while the other fulfills the soul's need for spiritual hydration. God is the water for the soul. Jesus, in his encounter with the Samaritan woman, called it "living water." When she asked about this water, Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks of this [well] water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."[1] The deer and the Samaritan woman want H_20, the water that sustains bodily life. Jesus offers a relationship with God, which is the water that leads to eternal life.

Our presence here today is a sign that we long for that water. We long for something more profound than the basic physiological needs and safety, and security. We have grown beyond living for needs, wants, and desires to seeking something more profound and life-altering. We recognize that there is more to life than just getting by and distracting ourselves with hobbies and little luxuries rather than addressing the heart's yearning for a deep relationship with our creator.

The secularized world tells us that hobbies and luxuries are what we really need. The hobbies can distract us from the difficulties of daily life (e.g., the motorcycles that roar through town all weekend long). The little luxuries are obtained by shopping in our boutiques and eating at our upscale restaurants, or staying at our pricey resorts. These are examples of the way the secular world seeks to assuage the longing that cannot be relieved except by our relationship with God.

I am not saying that we should live ascetic lives like monks or nuns. But if we use these distractions to forget about God and our need for a relationship with God, we have fallen prey to the god of consumerism and materialism that promises peace and joy, but cannot deliver anything close to it. What it does deliver is momentary and leaves us feeling we just need a little more to be satisfied. But there is nothing that fills the God shaped hole in our heart except for God. That place in us that yearns and longs for a deep relationship with our creator. Importantly, the longing goes both ways. God longs for a relationship with each of us as well. That is the overarching theme of the biblical narrative. Our longing for God and God's longing for us.

"As the deer longs for the water-brooks, *
so longs my soul for you, O God."

Give in to this longing. Recognize it as your heart's desire. Seek its fulfillment through worship, study, contemplation, and prayer. Settle into the love relationship with your creator, redeemer, and sanctifier. Really live life to the fullest, don't

---

[1] John 4:13-14 NRSVUE

masquerade as living through your Instagram feed. God put each of us here for more than just hobbies and little luxuries. When you follow that longing, there is no telling what you can do with your one wild and precious life.[2]

[2] Paraphrase of Mary Oliver from her poem "The Sumner Day."