

## Reoriented cravings

By [Sue Clemmer Steiner](#)

July 28, 2014

*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Steiner's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

Years ago, at a denominational gathering, I heard a visitor from the global South say the following about North American Christians:

They have so many things. They don't need anything. Yet it seemed like the people were very thirsty, like they were in a desert and we were bringing them drops of water.

These words refuse to leave me. They remind me of [this claim from Canadian theologian-activist Mary Jo Leddy](#):

Ours is a culture constituted through craving.... The problem arises when we think we're buying identity, meaning and purpose.... We are held captive when our deep spiritual longings are transformed into cravings for more.

And Leddy's words in turn draw me to the prophet Isaiah:

Ho, everyone who thirsts,  
    come to the waters;  
and you that have no money,  
    come, buy and eat!...  
Why do you spend your money  
    for that which is not bread,  
and your labor for that  
    which does not satisfy?

These words lure me into their orbit because they name my disordered belief that “just a little more” of whatever commodity or experience I’m craving will surely satisfy that yearning forever. They lead me to the spirit nourishment God longs to give. They tease me with the possibility that the world around me is not actually filled with experiences and commodities to be consumed, but rather with gifts to be received.

There’s an inner connection, I believe, between how I deal with my own strivings for more and how I notice and respond to needs around me. Put another way, there’s an inner connection between the Isaiah text and Matthew’s rendition of the feeding of the multitudes.

In Jesus’ startling words, “*You* give them something to eat,” I hear an implied mandate for disciples of Jesus to feed the hungry. I cannot possibly participate in such a mandate unless I have allowed by own spirit to be nourished by God—and my cravings to be reoriented toward God’s grace, justice, and abundance.