

10 Pentecost Year B  
August 1, 2021  
CCM

Let us pray. May the words of mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I am sure we have all heard the old adage: “We are what we eat.” I think at first it might strike us as being almost quaint with a certain folksy kernel of truth contained within.

But the reality, my friends, is that scientific studies have proven over and over again that this adage is exactly right. The types of food, the quality of food, and the quantity of food that you and I consume has everything to do with our physical health and wellbeing and thus our emotional and spiritual wellbeing as well.

Have you heard about programs like the “Blue Zones Project?” These studies have taken long-term looks at communities around the world where the residents live the longest lives. And what they have discovered is that the members of these communities share a common practice of eating in the healthiest ways possible. These folks aren’t living in food deserts, where potato chips and candy bars round out their daily caloric intake, all washed down with a three or four cans of soda. They are not consuming processed foods loaded with all kinds of chemicals. Instead, they are eating foods taken straight from their gardens and fields, cooked in olive oil, and physiologically they are much the better off for it. Indeed, what we eat seems to have everything to do with where we are in any given moment in our lives. And that truth applies both to individuals and to the overall health of the communities of which we are a part. Our wellbeing is very much connected to our consumption. Or, as one researcher put it, “At the core of who we are, we are food.”

We continue this morning with the second of a five part series of Gospel readings from the sixth chapter of John. You will remember that last week’s reading focused on the miracle of the feeding of five thousand people with just five barley loaves and two fish. As a result of being filled with such a miraculous meal, this crowd has decided that Jesus is probably the prophet that God has sent into the world and move to make him king. But Jesus will have nothing to do with their plan for reasons that later will become obvious. So he withdraws, only to be followed by the very same crowd. What follows is one of the most challenging conversations in all of the Gospels. Let us listen carefully.

Jesus knows why they are there. They have participated in a miracle that has filled their bellies and for the moment left them satiated. They figure that if they can get him to perform that same miracle over and over and over again, they will never go hungry again.

But again Jesus will have nothing to do with it. "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."

Jesus is acknowledging a harsh reality here. As wonderful and powerful as the miracles he performs are, they really are nothing more than snack food. They are moments that make a huge impression when first witnessed but then soon fade into memory. Like that chocolate cake in the refrigerator, they don't last forever. And Jesus has not come into the world to be a miracle worker. He has come to establish his Father's kingdom here on earth. To do that, comfort food will not be enough.

Obviously, the crowd is confused. They are probably growing hungry again and are looking for their next meal. They want more signs before they will believe, so they suggest Jesus perform like Moses and produce the manna that kept their ancestors going in the wilderness during the time of the Exodus.

But again, Jesus will have nothing to do with it. He is not here to provide them with their daily caloric intake. Instead, he has come to provide the food that leads to eternal life. This bread of life he is offering freely but at the same time he makes it clear that we must work for it. In order to receive this bread of life, we must do God's work, that is, we must believe completely in the one whom God has sent and act accordingly. For Jesus himself is the bread of life that God is now offering to the world.

Now let's be honest this morning. We can certainly say that we believe that Jesus is the bread of life. But frankly, sometimes the things he requires of us are hard to swallow. For example, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you." (Luke 6:27-28)

Frankly, sometimes Jesus can get stuck in our throats, no doubt about it. Sometimes we would still prefer to snack on a little anger, a little hatred, a little gossip, a little hard feelings and revenge. Yes, the bread of life is a gift from God. But we have to really work hard to fully ingest it.

But Jesus is willing to sacrifice everything, even his very life, in order that we might change and be given the strength to do this work of faith. It's always a challenge to improve our eating habits, and that includes our faith habits as well. But let's be clear. This morning, we are being invited to turn away from the spiritual junk food that tempts us in order to receive the spiritual food that leads to eternal life. Today, Jesus invites us to refocus our attention and know him to be the true bread from heaven, the one who comes from God to give life to each of us and to the world around us. He invites us to the work of believing in him and trusting in him entirely, so that we might be filled with his grace and truth. For, after all, we are what we eat.

This conversation will continue next week. Amen.

