

Being Fed by the Scriptures

Matthew 4:1-4
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First Presbyterian Church
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Have you ever had Ethiopian food? I'm married to a foodie, so yes, Yuri and I have had it, once at Blue Nile Café and again at a place called Awaze, which is the word for an Ethiopian sauce. Ethiopian food is not eaten with utensils. Instead you use a large, round flat bread called Injera. You break off a piece of the Injera flatbread and use it to scoop up a bite of the main course, sopping up some of the delicious Awaze sauce along the way.

It's an unusual way to eat, but in Ethiopia, there are people who think using utensils is a very unusual way to eat. In fact, for some of them, their faith teaches that putting a non-food object like a fork into your mouth defiles the body, making it impure. That's because when it comes to eating, they realize our mouths are made for food, not metal objects, or plastic. They're very concerned about what goes into the body, as is Jesus.

In today's New Testament lesson, Jesus says, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Here, Jesus equates food with the word of God. He actually elevates the scriptures as more important to life than food.

And yet, without food we would die. Is Jesus saying that without the word of God we would ... die? Yes, of course he is. And he's saying so much more, when he equates the food we eat with the words we hear and say.

Think about food for a minute. Think about your favorite dish or morsel of food. Think about the smell and the texture, the pleasure it gives you as you imagine diving into that food. When we're talking about fresh-baked bread, it's the aroma you first notice. The smell of fresh-baked bread is almost as satisfying and delicious as the bread itself. The warmth as it comes out of the oven, the steam that rises as you slice into the loaf or break off that first bite. Oh, and then when you bite into that crusty edge and sink your teeth into the warm, soft bread. Mmmm, my mouth is watering just thinking about it.

What if we approached the word of God like that, with the same anticipation and delight? The word of God – like the best bread you can imagine – is handcrafted by an artisan, our Heavenly Artisan who created all good things.

Like the best bread in all the world, the word of God is made from the finest ingredient, hand selected by God, to delight the senses and fuel the body, and soul.

The word of God has an everlasting shelf-life. It never gets stale or moldy. It's always fresh, because it's like yeast to bread. The living word of God is the special ingredient that breathes life into all that is good and holy on earth, and into our very existence. The word of God can be shared around the dinner table. It can be packeted up and sent off with children going to school and adults heading off to work. God's word is a precious gift when shared with your neighbor, and it's found in all the best marketplaces out in the community – just like bread.

The word of God is also one of the most personal and thoughtful and homey gifts you could give. And yet, is that how we treat God's word, the scriptures – as a handcrafted gift from the most special person in our lives, someone whose only concern is our nurture and wellbeing, bringing us a special something that's always fresh, a gift that graces any social setting, one that blesses others with a heart-felt expression of love and togetherness? Or do we treat the word of God as something that just spoils or gets in the way of having a good time.

One evening, the family was gathered around the dinner table and everyone was having a good time. Out of the blue, the son turns to his father and says, "Dad, are bugs good to eat?" "That's disgusting," says the father. "Don't talk about things like that over dinner." After dinner the father asks, "Now, son, what did you want to ask me?" "Oh, nothing," says the boy. "There was a bug in your soup, but now it's gone." We would never let a loved one eat a bug, just like we would never keep a fresh-baked loaf of bread all to ourselves. Not if there was someone to share it with. It's just such a joy to share something as wonderful as fresh baked bread, isn't it?

So why is it so hard for us to share the most loving and grace-filled parts of our lives, those precious gifts from God – the inspiration and hope and guidance we get from God? Why do we too often catch ourselves being neglectful and hurtful, and not wonderful and nurturing?

Well, it's because of the nature of this world we live in, the nature of the world going all the back to the first bit of food we put in our mouths as human beings, the forbidden fruit of the Garden of Eden.

Ever since we selfishly and defiantly took a bite of the apple when God told us not to, we've been destined to choose between the wonderful or the hurtful, and sadly we too often choose the hurtful. Why is that?

It's because we forget who we are, we forget whose we are, that we are children of God and not the spawn of Satan. Look at how the Devil tried to trick Jesus into forgetting who he was. Scripture tells us, "The tempter came and said to (Jesus), "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

Wow, what a trickster. If Jesus is the Son of God – which he is – then the commands he's concerned about, the precepts he follows, are God's not Satan's. God never told Jesus to turn stones into bread just to satisfy his hunger.

Well, it's the same with us. God doesn't want us misusing any part of creation just to satisfy ourselves, no matter how much the world tries to trick us into doing just that.

Like Satan with Jesus, the world tries to trick us into forgetting who we are, that we are God's beloved children put here to care for one another, brothers and sisters in Christ. It wants us to go around demanding what we want when we want it. The world -society- wants us to forget about who we are as children of God and use God's creation for our own selfish purposes.

God did not create the stones of the earth to be turned into bread, not even to feed Jesus in the midst of great hunger. No, God allowed Jesus to experience great hunger in order to show us how to overcome hunger.

We live in a world that hungers not only for food but for money and power and glory and outer beauty and popularity and so much more that never really satisfies, never meets our true need.

We were not made to get what we want when we want it. We are made to receive and cherish the good gifts of God, the blessings of God, the care and nurture of God. That's all we truly need. The air we breathe and the food we eat, first and foremost, is the care of God, the love of the Lord, and the nurture of the Holy Spirit.

But instead of being satisfied with that, being fed by that, we allow the world to call into question who we truly are, and then we cling to the false hope that world promises us. The world tells us we can command into existence whatever way we want, as if we could command stones to become bread.

Don't allow yourself to be fooled by the tricksters of this world, those people and things that fill you with junk food – mind, body and soul – things like too much mindless TV or internet or gaming, too much worrying about tomorrow, too much focusing on past hurts, too much stuff on today's schedule, too many negative people in your life.

There are far better things in creation that God has given us to put feed our minds and bodies and souls, things like the beauty of nature, the kindness of strangers, the fellowship of friends and family, opportunity each day to bless the lives of others.

The world calls into question all of this as well as our true identity before God, it gives us false hope by promising a power we don't truly have – stones to bread – and all the time it plays off our weakness and need, our hungers and desires.

And God answers the world with Jesus Christ, saying, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Imagine if every word that came from our mouths and every thought that arose in our minds and every feeling that welled up in our hearts was from God. Now that would truly be a Garden of Eden. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Here in this time of worship, O Lord, I offer myself fully to you. May your will be my guide. May your love be the pattern of my life. May your way be my hope. May your path be my help.

Lord, I surrender to you my hopes, my dreams, my goals, my ambitions. I place into your loving care my family, my friends, my life, my future. Care for them with your loving care!

I release into your loving care my fears and sorrows, my sense of loss, my pain and numbness, my sadness and hurt.

Fill me, Lord, here and now, with a deep sense of your presence and a strong sense of your empowering Spirit.

Take this time of prayer to renew our faith and replenish our hearts. Breathe new life into our spirits so that we may live with hope and confidence this day and every day.

It is with confidence in your promises of a peace beyond our understanding, renewal and fullness beyond our comprehension, and abundance beyond our wildest dreams that we pray for those in need this day.

We pray your peace and comfort upon those who grieve and your Spirit of healing and restoration upon those struggling with illness and disease.

We pray all this in the assurance of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who taught us to pray together, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.