

“This Food That We Eat”

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Nehemiah 8:10

“Go, eat rich food, and drink something sweet,” he said to them, “and send portions of this to any who have nothing ready! This day is holy to our God. Don’t be sad, because God’s joy is your strength!”

1 Corinthians 8:8, 10:31

Food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ... So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for God’s glory.

Luke 9:12-17

The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to Jesus and said, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.” But Jesus said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” They did so and made them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked to God, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

Wow! I get to talk about food today. I am sometimes surprised at how often people around me talk about food. About lentils, coffee, the smell of leftovers warming in the microwave, grilling out, the texture of yogurt, oatmeal... I heard a story of a boy whose mother started him out vegetarian, but when he went to summer camp, he discovered that he loved sausages. I guess I’m not the only one who enjoys talking about food.

Like others of you, I have had to face my relationship food. You may be aware that I have been on a rather restricted diet. But until 10 years ago, while I was health conscious, I ate pretty much the same things as everyone else. And, what is that?

I recently scanned through a fascinating book called *Hungry Planet*. In a series of photo essays, the author describes 30 families in 24 countries and what they eat in the course of a week. For many of earth’s human inhabitants, a week’s worth of food might consist of rice, some kind of legumes, maybe some flour, and whatever green things they can grow or find nearby.

For us in the states, well, I could not carry all the types of foods that might be eaten in a week. Let’s just say it includes multiple things from just about every aisle in the supermarket.

Until recently, this is what I ate. True, I included whole grains, not much meat, fat or salt, but I ate what I liked. I liked pasta and warm bread fresh from the oven slathered with butter and maybe some jam. While I never could make a piecrust, on Friday nights my family agreed that *this* was the best pizza crust recipe I had found, to date. Yet as time went on, I came to feel more and more unwell.

Maybe I am more attuned to my body’s messages than many people are, but what nourished them was not working for me. I eliminated a couple things from my menu which helped *some*, then in the spring, after considering long and hard, I decided to join my sister and her family in following the GAPS diet – a regimented, elimination diet for healing one’s gut.

So now my meals were made up of broth soups, ferments like sauerkraut and kimchi, meats, vegetables, and lots of healthy fats. No processed foods. No grains, potatoes, legumes, or other good things – though gradually we added back in eggs, nuts and fruits.

At first, I *craved* food. Those carb cravings you hear about are real. I was eating hourly that first day. Then, less often. And as the weeks went by, I began feeling better.

From the beginning, I was aware of how lucky I am to live where I have such food options, and that I can afford them. As I began to feel better, I wondered, wouldn’t this diet be better for everyone?

But, while we are all the same as children of God, we are also each unique. When we pray “Give us today our daily bread,” we understand that we are not simply asking for 3 square meals. And, that “daily bread” means different things for different people.

Today, as we think about the food that we need, I share a few of my learnings and some questions.

First, what is the food that we need?

My short list includes food, water, clothing, shelter; companionship and community; a sense of purpose, good work; love, joy, hope...

Some things on this list, we can supply for ourselves, most of the time. But without getting into it this morning, we acknowledge that even these things come from God. God makes us able to meet many of our own and each other's needs. And God expects us to do that. There are other things that we cannot supply independently. For a sense of purpose, we need others; we need God pointing out how we are each uniquely made for particular works.

We might be able to feel love, joy and hope on our own, but without other people, without other aspects of God's good world, our love cannot extend far. We need others; and we need God for this.

Next question: In what ways do we interfere with what God would give us?

Before I changed my diet, my eating got in the way of my feeling good.

In the same way, until we admit that our habits get in the way of living the abundant life God intends for us, and make some changes, our experience is never going to be as full and rich as it might be. Our moments of "my cup overflows" fullness are incentive to let God draw us closer.

That kind of richness when my throat swells in an awareness of the moment – I want more of that. Maybe you do too. For this to happen, we need to get ourselves out of the way. We need to put aside our own agendas and expectations. We need to make ourselves available for God's input.

About now you may be wondering why I am still talking about moments of wonder and joy. We are caught in pandemic. You are stuck at home with a bad case of cabin fever. Finances are strained. Tempers are short. Anxiety is rampant.

To this, I say, now is precisely when we need to be reminded that God is good. And that life is good.

What is the food we need? We need the food of hope. We need to be challenged out of our apathy and self-pity, out of our zoning before a TV or computer screen and reminded that as Easter people we believe in resurrection. We know that the future will have unexpected changes, yet we trust our God who works all things to the good. We trust that life will again be good!

Okay. What else?

Remember when your mother used to say, if Susie jumped off the bridge, would you do it, too? Just, because everyone else is doing something is not a valid reason for our doing it. And, just because "everyone else" does things a certain way does not mean this is God's intention for us.

One thing I have learned is that while I *can* eat, or live, like everyone else, I need to do differently. Theologically speaking, I am not supposed to be like everyone else. We are not supposed to be like everyone else.

Remember Jesus' words? You are the light of the world. Let your light shine, so that others may see your good works and give glory to God.

This is a call for us to live counter-culturally. Just because some people are protesting social distancing does not mean we should. Don't demand that others risk their health by going back to work simply so that we can have our familiar comforts.

Life is about more fresh bread or cheddar cheese, good haircuts and nails. Life is too precious and fragile to squander on what does not matter, or on what matters only peripherally.

Last question: Do you trust God enough to step out of the way so God can give you what you need?

When we agree to follow Jesus, it is a bigger commitment that we realize – more about responsibilities than privileges. Living our faith is about working to bring more of God's creation into abundant living. Living so that God's kingdom might come a little closer into being, right here and now.

It's about calling folks and writing notes. It's about not complaining when someone else seems to have it better. It's about admitting that our way of living has strained earth's capacities to the breaking point and accepting this down time as a wake-up call to live differently.

My invitation for you this week?

Listen to that still, small voice of God as Spirit working within you. Notice the places in your living that contribute to more wholeness. Consider your actions from a position of what leads to more fractured lives and what leads to abundance for *all* God's children. Assess your habits and lifestyle choices for how well they reflect Jesus' prayer that "your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven."

And with renewed sensibilities, accept what God offers and grow in the life God presents to you.

Would you pray with me?

Gracious God, help us to get ourselves out of the way so that we can receive what you have for us. Help us to trust that you nourish us as we need. And through our daily living, let us each be part of fulfilling your hope of abundant life for all of your children. Amen.