

Soul Food
Sunday Pentecost 14, Year B
Deuteronomy 4: 1 – 2, 6-9; Ephesians 6: 1 – 10; Mark 7: 14 – 23
August 29, 2021

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last week, I started the sermon by reading a particular verse, *“Wives submit to you husband as to the LORD”* (Eph. 5:22). Then I told you how I loathed that verse. It really is an uncomfortable piece of Scripture to read and discuss. You just never know another’s experiences, perceptions, beliefs, etc.

But, today... today, I present to you a part of a verse that I love... *“Thus he declared all foods clean”* (Mark 7:19). Oh, that makes my heart, and my stomach, so happy. But, there is the interesting connection... my heart, and my stomach... my HEART, and my STOMACH...

There is even a whole genre of food called... soul food.

Isn’t it interesting that we often talk that way. Things that make us physically happy, we also say make our heart, or our soul happy. So, feeding the body, also feeds our spirit... our soul?

Yes... and no...

Jesus talks about that distinction today, *“Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?”* (Mark 7:18-19).

The scribes and Pharisees had come to Jesus and accused his disciples of eating with unwashed hands. Which, wasn’t just an accusation, it was true. And, I must confess, I’ve done that, too. When I worked in the oil field, when I worked with my grandfather

building fence, feeding cattle, working the garden, etc... Often, you stop only long enough to eat, maybe rest a bit, but then it's right back to work. Dirty hands... sweaty face...

But, the problem that the Pharisees and scribes were trying to make, was that, by not washing their hands before they ate, they were now, somehow, spiritually unclean. They had been defiled.

Jesus points out that what defiles a person isn't what goes into the stomach, but what comes out of the heart. See the distinction... stomach... heart..

We, as Lutherans, are good at making distinctions. We don't believe in the separation of Church and state, but in the distinction of Church and state. We distinguish between God's Law and His Gospel. We distinguish between the sinful nature and the justified/sanctified nature.

Today, Jesus gives us a distinction between stomach and heart. This may sound funny, since you and I, even if we are untrained in the minutia of the human body, know the difference in location, shape, and function of those two organs.

But, that is not exactly what Jesus is talking about. He is making a larger, more meaningful, distinction. A distinction between the physical and the spiritual.

Now, we have to be careful here. It is one thing to distinguish between the two, but it is totally another thing to divide the two. The body and spirit go together. They are supposed to be inseparable. They are not meant to be removed from each other. This is why, as Christians, that death is such an unfortunate, unnatural, and grievous phenomenon.

The ripping of the spirit from the body that results in physical death and that happens often and every day, is, believe it or not, unnatural. It is not what God desires for His creation.

So, we must distinguish, as Jesus does, between the two. But, we must not speak as if one is good and the other is bad. Or, one is saved and the other is not. Jesus died for the whole of you; mind, body and spirit. You are, in total, saved. The resurrection of the dead will prove this, just as Jesus resurrection from the dead has proven this.

The ancient gnostics, and even their modern counterparts, have this all messed up. They see the spirit as good and the body as bad. We, because of Scripture, know that both are corrupt. Both are broken. Both are affected by the fall of mankind.

So, Jesus tells the disciples, *"Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?"* (Mark 7:18-19).

The spirit is not defiled by what you eat. The bacon and sausage you had for breakfast has not caused your spirit to be in a poor standing before God. It has not corrupted the spirit in any way. It may block an artery, but, your spirit is unaffected.

Don't wash your hands, and you may contract the Corona virus, but your spirit does not become infected.

This is simple, I think, for us to understand. But, it is not as simple for others within Christendom, where they make salvation dependent on their actions, their state of heart, or having enough faith.

This is, as we talked about last week, why Luther hated God (his words, not mine). A right standing before God was dependent on the sinlessness of the individual. God would only do so much to save a person, and it was up to them to do the rest of it. Or, as it has become popular to say, "Do your best and let God do the rest." This saying may work in almost everything, except salvation. When it comes to salvation, it is the full work of God. As, we heard St. Paul tell us just a few weeks ago in his letter to the Ephesians, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast"* (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Your salvation, your standing before God is not hindered by what you eat. Go get some catfish after church. Have some shrimp or a pork chop. Your standing before God will not be hindered.

But, what does hinder us before God is, in fact, not what goes in the stomach, but what comes out of the heart. Jesus says to us, *"What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person"* (Mark 7:20–23).

So, eating bacon everyday, may not be good for your body; and we should take care of our body. But, it does nothing toward your standing before God.

Perhaps none of this is news to you. But, you must understand that in the context of which Jesus speaks, it is revolutionary. A Jew was identified by keeping ALL the laws of God, including the kosher laws; laws pertaining to what you could or could not eat. This

had become such a part of the Jewish identity that if you did not follow them, you were in danger of being outside of God's covenant. You were in danger of being outside of God's people.

So, for Jesus to say, "*Meh, it doesn't matter what you eat. It's just what is in your heart that matters*"... blew the minds of the Pharisees, the scribes, the disciples and all who heard it. It was bordering on both blasphemy and heresy.

But, here is an interesting twist that does directly affect you and me. While, what you eat cannot defile you. It cannot cause you to be unclean before God. What you eat, can make you clean before God. How's that for a twist?

This is a beautiful thing that God does. He takes our stupidity and turns it around on us.

When you come to the Lord's Table, when you eat His body and drink His blood, it isn't the bread or wine that does anything. It is the body and blood of Jesus, present through the Word of God, that takes your sin sick heart and cleans it. The Holy Spirit does His work of delivering the 2000 year old sacrifice of Jesus' to you, right here, today.

And, it is this eating and drinking, it is Jesus, that cleanses you, and as St. Paul says this morning, equips you for battle.

When you are clothed with Christ, armored by Him, and stand holy before God, what chance does the Devil really have?

This eating of Jesus' physical body and blood, grants to us spiritual benefit. To exclude ourselves from coming to His table, from receiving that spiritual nourishment, we are not doing our spirit any favors.

Eating too much bacon may cause your body to fail. Not eating enough of Jesus' body and blood, may cause your faith and spirit to fail.

Thank God, that He cares for both, our bodies and our souls. Nourish your body by your stomach. Cleanse your heart by nourishing your spirit.

*Now may the peace that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ
Jesus.
Amen.*



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