



CHURCH of
the SAVIOUR

2537 Lee Road
Cleveland Heights, OH 44118-4136
Telephone: 216-321-8880
Website: www.COTSumc.org

“Feasting on the Word”

July 31, 2022

Ezekiel 3:1-3 (NRSV)

Rev. Andy Call

Of all the memories I have from summer camp, some of the most indelible involve food. Of course, we made s'mores. A marshmallow toasted on the end of a stick over an open fire, carefully transferred between two graham crackers with a piece of milk chocolate that melts ever so slightly from the heat of the marshmallow. Though there's always debate about the best way to toast a marshmallow – seared quickly on the outside or blackened by flames for some, slowly and gently warmed to a golden brown just before the point at which it drips from the stick for others (like me) – who doesn't love s'mores?

But marshmallows weren't the only thing we cooked over a campfire. Hot dogs were also easy to make and had the advantage of using the same sticks. But I also loved pie irons – cast iron molds hinged together with long handles. Two slices of white bread together with pie filling on the inside for the dessert variety, or for a savory option a couple slices of American cheese, or pizza sauce and pepperoni and mozzarella to make a pizza pocket, or the old classic peanut butter and jelly. We also made foil packet dinners, assembled earlier in the dining hall with a hamburger patty, potatoes, onions, and other vegetables, then marked with our names and toted in a cooler to the campsite, where we would carefully nestle them near the coals to cook through. Such a simple thing to make, but oh did that taste good to me as a kid, knowing that I'd made it myself! As I got a little older, we also got to make our own griddles out of a coffee can turned upside-down and a tuna can filled with corrugated cardboard and paraffin as the fuel source, on which we'd cook French toast or “egg in a hole.” There are things you eat at camp that you just don't eat anywhere else.

Campfire dinners were a special treat, but most meals were shared in the dining hall. Those weren't as memorable because they were basically cafeteria food. If memory serves, though, camp breakfast was my first exposure to Spam, diced and sauteed with scrambled eggs. They were probably powdered eggs, too. As a kid, I remember thinking it wasn't too bad. But my attempt to recreate that culinary experience in college didn't land nearly as well.

When I was a kid, the camp canteen was open every afternoon, where we could use the money, our parents left in our account to buy things like bug spray or batteries or a new flashlight, but with wise kid frugality that money could go toward afternoon snacks. My go-to was a Mallo Cup and Mr. Pibb, flavors I still and always will associate with climbing to the top of the hill at Camp Aldersgate after an hour of swimming in Leesville Lake.

I don't imagine as a kid that I considered the spiritual aspects of food or how it could serve as a metaphor for our faith. We took Communion at church camp, of course, and I knew that Jesus had taught his followers to eat bread and drink wine or grape juice as a way to remember his sacrifice and celebrate his living presence in us. I knew the story of the feeding of the 5,000 and how Jesus met the physical needs of people in addition to the spiritual “feeding” that day. And I'd probably heard the verse from Psalm 34 that reads, “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” But it wasn't until much later that I began to appreciate that the way we understand eating can help us better understand the how we engage with God's Word.

“One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 to refute Satan's temptation to turn stones into bread, pointing out that it takes more than food to sustain us for this journey we call life. We derive sustenance from God's Word, the source of spiritual nourishment to carry us through both good times and bad. In the Gospel of John, Jesus talked about bread in relation to himself: “I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” We explored the meaning of those words last March in our sermon series for Lent, along with the other “I am” sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Jesus used the example of manna in the wilderness that sustained God's people returning from exile to teach them to trust in God's sufficiency to provide our daily bread. To say that Jesus is the Bread of Life is to say not only that God provides for our every need, but that Jesus sustains us with the gift of eternal life.

In the time after the Bible was written, bread became a symbol for the Word of God. Rabbinical writings taught that learning from God's Word is as necessary for life as bread and water. As the old saying goes, “You are what you

eat.” What we “ingest” determines the level of our health. Spend your days eating junk food, and you won’t be physically healthy. Surround yourself with people who don’t practice empathy, and your heart will lose its concern for others. Fill up regularly with mindless entertainment, and your brain will lose some of its sharpness. In our house, we refer to video games and sitcoms as “brain candy” as a reminder that while those things may be fun, they shouldn’t make up the core of our mental diet. Likewise, if we aren’t grounded in God’s Word and practice being in God’s presence, we’re missing the nutrition needed for the proper development of our spiritual lives.

God’s Word as spiritual food is at the heart of God’s instruction for Ezekiel in today’s scripture lesson. But here, it is quite literal. “Eat this scroll,” says God, “and go, speak to the house of Israel.”

Ezekiel was a priest in the temple when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. Like many of the other leaders in Judah, he was taken into captivity in Babylon and resettled there. But that wasn’t the end of Ezekiel’s story. God wasn’t finished with him yet. One day, Ezekiel had a divine encounter, a vision of the glory of God surrounded by four creatures, each supported by a wheel that could move in any direction. It was a terrifying vision, but also one that inspired awe and worship. A voice spoke to Ezekiel, telling him that he was being sent as a prophet to the people of Israel. Suddenly, a hand reached out to him, holding a scroll rolled open with words written on both sides. “Eat this scroll.”

In 2006, Eugene Peterson, the architect of *The Message* version of the Bible, wrote a study titled, *Eat This Book*. Inspired by the story of Ezekiel and a parallel scene in Revelation, Peterson encouraged readers not only to read the Bible, but to *ingest* it, to engage it in such a way that God’s Word would become a part of their very being. Eating, Peterson wrote, was a perfect metaphor for how we are to study the Bible. When we eat, our bodies break down the components of food into nutrients that our systems need. Those components are absorbed into our bloodstream, feeding cells and muscles and organs and sinews, providing building blocks to sustain life, becoming part of our bodies in the process. Peterson insisted we should study the Bible in the same way, taking it into ourselves, allowing that encounter with our faith and with the God revealed in the pages of scripture to become a part of our *spiritual* substance, shaping, and sustaining us.

Ezekiel needed not only to *receive* God’s Word, but for it to become a *part* of him, for it to be embedded in the fiber of his being, because the task before him was daunting. He was sent with unwelcome news. Much of Ezekiel’s message is a scathing critique of how the people of Israel had turned away from God. They had put their hope in false political allegiances instead of faithfulness to the covenant. They plundered the poor to benefit the wealthy. Their cultic practices had desecrated the temple so badly that God abandoned it. And without God’s protective presence, the temple would not survive. God would send judgment, Judah would be destroyed, and the people would get their just desserts. Ezekiel’s message was not an easy one to hear, nor was it easy to deliver. And because God knew the people would not listen, Ezekiel would need to continue to deliver his message over and over again for years.

It was not all bad news. Eventually, Ezekiel would also share a message of restoration. Israel would not remain in exile forever. God heard their cries and felt their pain. In time, God would restore them and help them rebuild the temple, where God would once again be found.

But Ezekiel’s call was a difficult one. And his instruction was to eat the *entire* scroll – not a nibble or a morsel, but to eat until his stomach was filled. It sounds like an odious task. But Ezekiel ate it, and it was as sweet as honey. And it sustained him on his mission.

Church camp wasn’t marketed as a week spent studying the Bible. Not many kids that age would be sold on that, including me. I went because I knew there would be adventures and games and new friends and great food (in spite of the Spam). The genius of camping ministry is that all those things – the games, the crafts, the hikes, the stories told around campfires, and yes, even the food – were all about embodying God’s Word. When we gathered for morning watch, looking out over the early morning mist on the lake, we could almost see the disciples casting their net on the other side of the boat. When we ran the relay race, it was like we were the ones feeding the sheep. Singing songs around tables, we were right there with Zacchaeus in the tree. Hiking a trail at night, our flashlight became the Word of God that was a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. And munching on a snack with our family group, we could taste and see that God is good. Those activities helped us take faith from the abstract to the concrete, to let God’s Word become a part of who we are.

That shouldn’t stop when we become adults. We should never outgrow the sense of wonder that comes with discovering new ideas and experiences. That’s part of how God designed us. We need to rediscover wonder and joy and adventure as part of our life of faith. Following Jesus isn’t a chore; it’s a chance to discover what we’re usually too busy or too preoccupied to realize. The realization that the mission project you signed up for to help others did more to grow

your faith than you expected. The verses of a Psalm long ago committed to memory coming back to you just when you need them to bring hope and comfort. The hymns that my father-in-law sings as he starts his day with joy in his heart. The richness of praying and studying scripture with a small group of people who genuinely care about one another. The “Aha!” moments of Bible study, like discovering the intentional organization of the stories of Jesus by the gospel writers to emphasize what they most wanted us to remember. The enlightenment of recognizing the symbolism and architecture of Hebrew scriptures and the wordplay that only becomes apparent when we read them in their original language. The knowledge that everything Jesus said and did and taught and suffered were to demonstrate how much God loves us and how much we matter. Our adventures in faith don’t end when we become adults or stop going to summer camp – they grow up with us, becoming deeper and more nuanced and grounded in lived experience...if we make the time and the space to experience all that God wants for us.

As we conclude our series on summer camp, I hope you’ve found joy in reminiscing about your own time at camp or hearing the experiences of others. Maybe some of what we’ve shared has sparked renewed interest in getting out in nature or supporting camping ministries. But more than anything, I hope you’re inspired to keep seeking adventure in your faith, because God wants us to keep learning and discovering throughout our lives. Following Jesus is a great adventure. Make a splash. Glow with God. Grow in faith. Eat this book. God’s Word is a treasure trove of discovery and wonder. Embody your faith so that it isn’t just something you do on Sundays or special days, but it becomes a part of everything you are. Taste and see that the Lord is good...not just sometimes, but *all* the time. Amen.