



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Taste and See

July 31, 2011

The Rev Sharon Gracen

Thus says the Lord:

*"Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.*

Could there be a more inviting description of God's intention to provide goodness to everyone than these words from Isaiah? It is such an extravagant concept – that everyone should be fed and fed well. Kind of a divine entitlement program. This invitation to be fed richly should be heard on more than one level. The good food and wine and milk offered here are certainly meant to be understood as real food for the body, but they are also that which nourishes our mind and our spirit. It is God's will that everyone enjoy the spiritual sustenance of love and wisdom just as God would have everyone well nourished and healthy.

There is always a strong connection between Isaiah and Jesus. After all, the first words of Jesus' public ministry were from the great prophet. In the synagogue in Nazareth he read from the scroll, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And then he sat down and said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus' ministry was dedicated to showing what God's abundance looks like. He opens blind eyes and helps us see so that we can know where we are going. He cures the lame – that is he cures us of all that would hold us back and keep us from walking the path that he shows. And then he feeds us.

In our Gospel story today, the feeding of the 15,000, the 5000 men and the women and children that were with them, Jesus demonstrates what life is like in God's commonwealth. This story may be most importantly the schooling of the disciples – they said, "send them away so they can go and provide for themselves." Jesus said no, "all that we need is right here; you can

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feed them.” Imagine their skepticism! I’m sure that they were thinking “15,000, five loaves and two fish – do the math, Jesus!” But Jesus does a higher math. He’s already cured all of these people, now in feeding them he will cure the disciples of their small thinking. They give out the food and it just keeps on coming. There is enough for people to be satisfied with 12 baskets left over – one for each of the disciples to continue the sharing of God’s bounty. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord, come and be fed.

There is an important message incorporated in Isaiah’s words for today – “why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and that which does not satisfy?” I hear this as a call to conscious living – understanding what we truly need and what abundance means. Abundance does not seek a life-style of the rich and famous, it isn’t about getting as much as you can of what you want, but instead a confidence that you will have all that you need of what is good for you. Abundance invites you to trust and to be a part of God’s mission of abundance for others.

There is no better illustration of this principle than food. A friend gave me a most interesting book called *In Defense of Food; An Eater’s Manifesto*. The author is Journalism Professor Michael Pollan and while he doesn’t make the connection to Isaiah, he’s really written a book that asks us why we spend our money on that which does not satisfy us and isn’t even good for us.

Professor Pollan identifies most of what Americans eat as no longer food, but “food-like substances.” He also says that we live in the age of nutritionism – what we eat has been reduced to individual nutrients and in the process we have lost much. It all started with margarine. Remember when someone decided suddenly that butter was bad for us and that this new manufactured substance made from corn oil and chemicals was going to be better? The old fats, butter and lard, fell out of favor as the American consumer began to be influenced by what is now a \$32B a year food marketing juggernaut. In the 80s, around the time that the American obesity epidemic began, Pollan remarks that food began to disappear from the supermarkets. It was replaced with packaged, preserved substances infused with “nutrients” and a whole lot of high-fructose corn syrup. This was also the time that portions began to explode all over our plates. Fast, cheap and lots of it became the Western food philosophy. And since that time, American health has declined drastically. What passes for food in our diet does not satisfy and indeed is making us sick despite all of the searching for the magic bullet nutrient, vitamins, anti-oxidants, omega-3 oil. All of those things are good but are robbed of their true effectiveness when pulled out of their naturally occurring context.

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Michael Pollan's solution is simple; eat food, not too much, mostly plants. Unfortunately, it is not always that easy. Food that is good for you is sometimes hard to find, more expensive and takes time to prepare. This requires a profound shift in our thinking about food and why and how we eat it. We need to move beyond thinking of food as a collection of nutrients and allow it to be a source of blessing and joy once again. An apple is not a collection of sugars, vitamins and enzymes. Certainly all of those things are in there but somehow together, eaten whole, especially uncontaminated by pesticides an apple is a crunchy, sweet sphere of healthy goodness that cannot be made better by science.

There is a considerable and growing body of evidence that what we eat is killing us or at least making us sick. Children are most at risk from the effects of what is in their meals and snacks. That includes obesity, allergies, diabetes, attention deficit disorder and cancer. A Happy Meal is anything but. For all of the time and money being spent to keep our arteries clear, Americans are still having the same number of hospitalizations for heart problems. The death rate has dropped but only because we have extraordinary technologies and gifted doctors who will reach inside of you and replace what has been clogged or damaged. But ultimately it doesn't solve the problem. We would be well served to listen to Michael Pollan, "eat food, not too much, mostly plants."

In nutrition circles, there is something called the French paradox. The French eat all kinds of buttery sauces, red meats, cheese, foie gras, chocolate and wine and they are much healthier than we are. So what gives? First of all, the French love and appreciate food; it is a sensual delight, a means and cause for celebration, prepared with care, enjoyed slowly in modest proportions, at a table with someone else. The French would probably hate it that I call their relationship with food a good theology. It honors what creation gives us, it requires a commitment, it nourishes and satisfies, it binds people together, it is good stewardship.

How we eat our food is more important than anyone at General Mills, Nestle or McDonalds would ever admit. For Jesus, food was always shared. In no place in the Gospels will you find Jesus grabbing a sandwich and eating it on the road. He was always at table, in community, and he made food our sacrament. No priest can celebrate the Eucharist alone, the abundance must always be shared. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord. Come and be fed.

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