

Soul Food

St. Mark Lutheran
Thanksgiving Eve

Pastor Ken Welsh
Nov. 21, 2018

*"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me-practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.
Philippians 4:8-9*

You'll notice by looking at the altar tonight that we are not going to be celebrating the Lord's Supper. It has not been planned as part of our service this evening. So we will not see with our eyes tonight the outward signs of unity it brings to the church as we gather, kneeling or standing, shoulder to shoulder, as brothers and sisters in Christ. I have no problem with this; but it deserves mention, and we will return to more thoughts on it later.

But we are just hours away from a very special day, one in which most of us will find ourselves unified in something else-turkey. But for the majority, it is not just turkey, but turkey and stuffing, mashed potatoes and gravy or sweet potatoes or both, maybe a green bean casserole, cranberry sauce, pumpkin or pecan pie, and whatever else you wish to add. Most of us will be in our homes giving thanks with family and/or friends.

So what will come of all this feasting? Well, if you are like me, a little too many helpings of food. The first sign of this over indulgence may be the loosening of a belt buckle. You may feel like taking a nap. You might even fall asleep during the football game. You might say for the majority of people Thanksgiving is all about food and having lots of it.

Come to think of it, that just about describes how we operate the other 364 days a year. As an American culture, we have something of an obsession with food. But there are some differences. Unlike the home cooked meal many are waiting to enjoy, we have become a fast-food, pre-packaged society. The satisfaction of a meal is based more on its quantity than its quality. It is estimated that we are so rushed and short of time that the average American family eats about 40 percent of its meals out, making it more difficult to make nutritional choices. We are constantly on the run shoving Big Macs or something else in our mouth and washing them down with a Coke or another soft drink.

The stark reality of this was made into a movie in 2004. The title was Super Size Me by Director Morgan Spurlock. Did any of you see it? Spurlock made a documentary of himself to find out what would happen if he ate McDonald's every day for a month. He had four rules: 1) He had to super-size his meal if asked. 2) He could only eat food from McDonald's. 3) He had to eat everything on their menu over the course of the month. 4) He had to eat three meals a day.

He lined up three doctors, a dietician, and an exercise physiologist to help him monitor things. They confirmed that he was in good health for a man his age. Now what do you think happened? At the end of thirty days, he had gained 24.5 pounds. His cholesterol count went up 65 points from 165 to 230. His body fat increased from 11 percent to 18 percent. He was informed that he had doubled his risk of heart disease and heart failure and that his liver had literally turned to fat-all in just thirty days!

Now I am not trying to spoil your Thanksgiving for you. For most people, overeating one meal a year is not going to cause them trouble. You can still go to McDonald's once in a while. But let us not kid ourselves. You probably have heard this: "You are what you eat!" The mirror doesn't lie. The blood tests don't lie. The checkups don't lie. They tell the story of our physical condition based on how we eat.

Now the condition of our bodies is very important, but there is something else even more important. It is our souls. We are not just an organic mass driven by some primitive need. We were specially created by God in his image. We are body and soul, joined together as one, each coming together to make the whole. And each one is in need of proper nourishment if it is to be strong and healthy.

In our physical bodies, nourishment comes in through the mouth and is digested in the stomach. But for the soul, its nourishment comes in through the eyes and ears and is digested in the mind. Just like the body, the health of the soul is affected by what it is fed.

Would you agree with me, that as we look around, it is increasingly difficult to make wise choices from the menu for our souls? Consider the television shows, the advertisements, and the mainstream music. What kind of a message do they send? Are we filling our minds with the kind of nourishment our souls need to be healthy, or are we exposing them to the wrong things? Have you visited one of the pornographic sites on the computer recently? If so, just remember what the Apostle Paul said about a believer's body: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19)

We must not fool ourselves into thinking that we can ignore or easily handle these matters. "It won't affect me," too many people say or think to themselves, and meanwhile they are being desensitized to the things that are pouring in through their eyes and ears.

So what is the remedy for all of this? As far as our body is concerned, by far the best solution is to change your diet. It's true for the body, and it's true for the soul. We have a dietician for tonight's service and it is the Apostle Paul. To a soul-sick world, he presents a menu of things which will keep you strong and healthy spiritually. He writes in Phil. 4:8, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." The next verse is very important also. "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me-practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." (Phil 4:9)

Now Paul tells us to "think about these things". He wants us to meditate on them. He wants us to chew on them for a while, not just gulp them down. His list starts with something very important, "whatever is true". Jesus is the truth. In John 8 he says this to all who have a concern for their souls, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." To our sin-sick souls, Jesus has come to bring life and forgiveness by his death on the cross. He is the remedy to all of our failures. His blood covers all of our sin and frees us from the sentence of eternal death. As we gather tonight, there are many things we can and should thank God for, but there is nothing on the list more important than salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

What does Jesus tell us to do this evening? He says to "abide in my word". Do you understand what "abide" means? It means to remain connected to Him through His word. It is great that you were baptized; it is wonderful if you went to Sunday school and were confirmed; the Lord worked through all these things to bring you faith and give you spiritual strength. But what strengthens your faith and brings you spiritual strength today? It is the word of God. Don't neglect that. It is that of which Christ said, "My words are spirit and they are life." That is what God calls on us to do to help maintain healthy souls.

At the same time, there is something special that God is doing to take care of our souls. I spoke earlier that we receive nourishment for our souls through our eyes and ears, but God has made one exception to that. It's the meal we call the Lord's Supper. In the mystery of the real presence, nourishment comes to us through our mouths. Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we give thanks for many things tonight, let us put the "soul food" that Jesus gives us at the top of the list. He miraculously gives us his own body and blood to sustain and nourish us in the one true faith unto life everlasting. Amen.

