

You’d be hard pressed to identify a holiday with more of a direct line to eating than Thanksgiving Day. This is at least partially related to the first harvest celebration held in Plymouth in 1621. Culinary historians tell us that the Plymouth meal likely included a variety of game, fowl, and local produce like corn, beans, and squash, while at the same time, absent from the meal were modern staples like potatoes and cranberry sauce.

A woman named Sarah Josepha Hale popularized the turkey as the centerpiece of the Thanksgiving meal thanks to her novel called *Northwood*, published in 1852, as well as her influential magazine Godley’s Lady Book. These days, a lavish dining experience is still part of the formula for Thanksgiving Day, in and amongst parades, football, Black Friday deals and, yes, even services of worship.

I don’t think it’s a coincidence that God routinely uses food language to communicate His love to us. It’s language that we get. Everyone knows what it means to be thirsty or hungry. We can tell the difference between a carefully prepared meal and a bag of junk food. I think we even understand, at some level, that sharing a table with someone means something; it implies a relationship that we desire and want to nurture. Our Lord uses all these food-related ideas and more as a way of describing his desire to serve us and give us life.

For example, tonight’s passage from Isaiah is enough to make your mouth water. The Almighty God invites everyone to his feast. He talks about His gifts in terms of water, wine, milk, and bread. He sets His table with “the richest of fare.” Come, enjoy the best, the Lord God says. It’s free. It’s for you.

Throughout Scripture, it’s more of the same. The gospels record times when Jesus set the table for thousands of hungry people and miraculously satisfied their hunger. The Lord of creation demonstrated his compassion by meeting physical as well as spiritual needs. There’s also more than a hint of an even

better meal that is to come, a meal at which Jesus will again take bread, give thanks, break it, and give it to his disciples. Jesus uses food language—and food itself—to nourish you and me and build us up in our faith. He wants to give you nothing less than full pardon of your sins; confident life in Him today; and true peace in knowing you do not stand condemned, but you stand to inherit eternal life, thanks to his passion, death, and resurrection. He sets the table with these delights and says, come and eat. I made them just for you.

It's beautiful, isn't it? There's a problem, though; the problem being our appetite for junk food. God asks the question through his prophet, Isaiah: "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?" Why, indeed? Why do we fill our lives up with things that don't bring us any closer to Christ? Why do we work to fill our homes with things that cannot remove guilt, or soothe a conscience? Why do we devote so many hours to staring at screens, when there's so much life to be lived, and so many greater God-given gifts to be enjoyed? Are you eating what is good? Do you regularly feast on the richest fare that Christ provides? Or are you spending money on what is not bread, and laboring for things that cannot satisfy?

It doesn't take long to become spiritually malnourished. Just keep your Bible closed. Just stay away from church for a while. Tune out the preaching and teaching of God's Word. Stay away from the Supper of our Lord. Stop speaking to Him in prayer. Forget about your baptism. That'll do it. If, one day, you stop eating food, you'll die. We know this. Faith is no different! And this is one of the greatest dangers we face as Christians. We start filling our lives with commitments and pursuits and pastimes that aren't bad—they're just OK. But in filling our lives with "just OK" commitments and pastimes and pursuits, we forget the great stuff. We pass on the holy things, the best things. We think we don't have time for them. We settle for the OK buffet. Then when life knocks us for a loop, we find out, too late, that faith has shriveled—it's atrophied like an unused muscle—we have no clue what the Bible says about our situation or even where to look. Our strength is gone and we can't think straight because we haven't been eating the good stuff!

It's not too late to adjust your appetite. Again, through Isaiah, God says: "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare." Eating what is good begins with believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It begins with savoring His mercy—he will not punish us according to our sins. It begins with appreciating His grace—He wants to serve you, feed you, and give you life. Eating what is good means finding out more about this Jesus, who would rescue us from Satan's power, by learning about Him in Holy Scripture. Eating what is good means believing that a simple, humble church service is, in fact, the setting in which Jesus serves us. Every time we gather, our Lord brings out the great stuff and serves it. He adopts through Holy Baptism. He convicts sinners, distributes forgiveness, creates faith, and instructs us through His Holy Word. And yes, he sets a table and feeds us His own body and blood to forgive our sins and to keep our faith lively and active. When you keep eating what is good, you will discover that your appetite for the great stuff, the holy things of God, will grow. You'll find yourself saying "no thanks" to things that are "just OK," in order to have time for the really good stuff—the stuff that tells us again who Jesus is and what He did for us; the stuff that tells us who we are because of Jesus—that "stuff" being the Holy Bible, good devotional materials, the Divine Service, whatever is Christ-centered. This is the food group that we need. This is the food group that the Lord attaches His promise to. He says: "Listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare." Did you hear the promise? Eat what is good, and your soul will delight—not in something "just OK"—but in God's "richest fare," the best gifts God has to give, lovingly prepared for you by Jesus himself. The promise is that your soul will delight! You will find your way home to the feast of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Take the Lord God up on this promise. Eat what is good, and give thanks.