

Sermon for Sunday November 6, 2022
Psalm 19:7-12, 14; Psalm 119:97-105; Ezekiel 2:8-3:7

We Are What We Eat, Part Two
Mortal, Eat This Scroll!

Let's review. The Vision Council here at First Mennonite Church is responsible, in part, for the spiritual health of this congregation. One of the ways we've been talking about that recently is in terms of our spiritual diet. Just as our physical bodies need to eat well in order to be healthy, so do our spiritual beings. You could say that a healthy spiritual diet consists of four *spiritual "food groups"*: *Worship; Word; Fellowship, and Mission.*

Last week I posed the question "Why do we worship?" For one, we worship in order to be spiritually healthy. Which is to say that if we don't worship, we will eventually become spiritually sick. But there are other reasons why we do this. We worship in order to be reminded who God is, and who we are in relation to God.

We looked at Psalm 100. Where the psalmist commanded us to "*Know that the Lord [one of whose names is Yahweh] is God. It is he that made us, and we are his, we are his people, and the sheep of his pastor*" [100:3]. Our worship, therefore, grows out of that knowledge, that relationship. Because to know God is to love God. And so we are here this morning, in part, to express our love for God in our worship. [Sing "Holy, Holy, Holy."] It feels good, right?

Now. [Show picture on bulletin.] What is it with honey, anyway? Why does it taste so good? That's easy: because it's sweet. And, it's a wholesome kind of sweet. Pure. Natural. Organic. A teaspoon dissolved in a cup of tea, or spread on a piece of toast, is the best way to start the day. And for those of us who like a bit of crunch in our diet, try a piece of honeycomb.

It's amazing to think how ancient honey is. Ancient enough that it is mentioned in the Bible. Sixty-four times. In Genesis, all the way through Revelation. As one of the staples of human well-being. The promised land was to be a land flowing with milk and honey.

And then there are those times when the sweetness of honey was used in Bible to talk about the Word or words of God. Like in Psalm 119, when the psalmist declares "*How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*" Sweeter than honey?? That's pretty sweet!! And then he says to God, "*Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.*" When the psalmist talks about God's word or words, he's talking in part about the Torah. The law. Their Scripture. Their Bible. Which God graciously gave to his people for their guidance, their health, their life, their well-being, their spiritual food. It's no surprise that there are also biblical references to "eating" God's word.

So what might it mean to "eat" God's word? I want to mention four things.

First, it means quite simply that we must read the Bible. Take it into ourselves. Swallow it, we could say. Gulp it down. Devour it. Because, after all, aren't we ravenously hungry for God's words to us, God's teaching, God's guidance? It follows, therefore, that we should read from the Bible as often as every day. Perhaps multiple times a day. Even if it's just a few verses at a time. Make it your habit. Your personal discipline. Following a reading plan can be helpful. At my previous church, we decided to follow together a reading plan called "The Bible in 90 Days." I confess I had never read the entire Bible, cover to cover. Doing so in 90 days meant reading twelve pages a day. Let's just say I was pretty full.

But **second**, we all know it's not enough, or not healthy, to simply swallow Scripture, to gulp it down as fast as we can. So we can, you know, get on with other parts of our day. We have to chew it. Slowly, and mindfully. We have to digest it.

What might this mean when what we're talking about is not literal food, but the Bible? At the very least it means to think about it as we read it. To ponder it. Participating in some kind of Bible study can be extremely helpful, whether it's on your own or in a group. And by the way, this is why we almost always include a sermon as part of the worship service each Sunday. It's another way of eating God's word. The one preaching the sermon will have already done some significant chewing. And on Sunday he or she passes it on to others in the congregation so that they may chew further. Sunday School is an additional opportunity to eat God's word, to chew on it together. You can never chew too much. And, in stark contrast to just gulping it down whole, and then moving on to other things, sometimes it is important to keep chewing after we have each returned to our own homes, to keep pondering. Keep a journal, perhaps. Include it in our prayers. Ask for God's help in digesting what we have heard, or read, or eaten.

Third, all too often we forget to taste our food as we are chewing. Eating is not just for sustenance; it is also for pleasure. We must take time to taste what we are chewing. Enjoy it. Delight in it. Roll individual verses or phrases or even single words around with your tongue. Savor it. And then, give thanks for it.

There is yet a **fourth** dimension to what it means or looks like to eat God's word. And this brings us to this morning's passage from the prophet Ezekiel. Chapter 3, verse 3: "*He said to me, 'Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was sweet as honey.'*" Verse 4. "*He said to me: Mortal, go to the house of Israel and speak my very words to them.'*" We find four imperatives, four commands, in these two verses. *Eat. Fill. Go. Speak.*

It is not enough to simply eat and be filled with the Word of God. as sweet and pleasurable as that may be. Our task is only half done. It is not enough to come here, and eat God's word, and then return home. (And take a nap, or watch the Chiefs game on television. Which I plan to do! ☺) We must go—out, to our people—and then speak what we have heard.

Seems easy enough; we don't have to come up with what to say; God gives us the words. Seems harmless enough. Nobody minds a few Bible verses now and then. There's usually lots of cheerful, encouraging stuff in there, right? Well, usually; but not always. God's words are not obscure or difficult to understand (God told Ezekiel). But sometimes, they are hard. Our people may not like them. Verse 10 (which we have not heard yet), says this: "*He said to me: Mortal, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart and hear with your ears; then go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them. Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God'; whether they hear or refuse to hear.'*"

We don't only eat God's word for our own sustenance and pleasure, our own nourishment and enjoyment. We eat it in order that we may then be sent out to share it with the world. We will talk more about this when we come to Part Four of this sermon series, in which we will talk about "Mission." But first, in Part Three, we will talk about "Fellowship." Another very important and necessary part of a healthy spiritual diet. And even that will have to wait. Because next week we will have a special guest speaker (Michelle Hershberger). And then after that, we will have Mission Sunday, and then, after that, the season of Advent begins! But never fear; we will come back to it. And anyway, in the meantime, we will keep eating God's Word. So eat. Fill. Go. Speak!

Amen.