

Sermon for the Third Sunday of the Epiphany, January 22, 2023
Acts 2:41-47

A Spiritual Diet Plan (We Are What We Eat!), Part 3
Devoted to Fellowship

You may (or may not!) remember that “way back last year” I started a sermon series called “A Spiritual Diet Plan.” This was at the initiative of the Vision Council here at FMC. The first sermon in the series was titled “Why We Worship,” and the short answer was that worship is vital to our spiritual health. Without it we would wither and fade. The slightly longer answer came in two parts: we worship to remind ourselves 1) who God is, and 2) who we are in relation to God. So that’s what we’re doing here this morning: reminding ourselves who God is, and who we are in relation to that God.

The second sermon in the series was titled “Mortal, Eat This Scroll,” and its focus was on eating God’s word, that is, the Bible. I said that eating God’s word means first of all taking it into ourselves, devouring it hungrily, but also chewing it, digesting it, taking the time to taste it and savor it. But that’s not all. We then go out and share it with the world around us. In other words, after we eat God’s word, we must go and speak God’s word.

Those are very quick summaries; the full sermon manuscripts are available on our church web site under “Resources,” in case you want to read them.

Now, after taking a seven-week pause for the Advent/Christmas/Epiphany season, we come back to this series, and to Part Three of our spiritual diet plan. I hope you’re hungry!

Verse 41 of this morning’s passage from Acts gives us just a bit of context, but let me offer a bit more. After Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, the disciples had gathered together in the “upper room.” And suddenly the Holy Spirit came upon them, first like a loud wind, then like tongues of fire. The disciples had all begun to speak in different languages, which had startled the crowds (and some even accused the disciples of being drunk!), but this led to Peter giving his very first sermon. That’s right, Simon Peter, that impulsive, prone-to-just-blurt-things-out former fisherman. A sermon in which he used Scripture to prove who Jesus was. Namely the Messiah. Aka the Savior of the world.

Which brings us finally to verse 41 [*“So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.”*] “Those who welcomed his message” refers to those in the crowd who heard the disciples speaking in tongues, who stuck around for Peter’s sermon, and who were convinced by what he said about who Jesus is. In other words, they became believers. Luke then tells us that these new believers “were baptized.” This was like their initiation into this brand-new group of people called the “Church.” Just like we Anabaptist-Mennonites are baptized when we join the church.

Now Luke felt it was important to add that “about three thousand persons were added” or baptized, at or around that time. One commentator I read said that this was purely for shock value. That the number itself doesn’t matter. It could have been three hundred. It could have been thirty. It could have been two or three. The size of the church doesn’t matter (which is some comfort to us, right?). What matters is what they do together.

The next verse tells us. [*“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”*] “They devoted themselves.” Interesting

word and word phrase. They committed themselves to. They prioritized. They focused on, to the exclusion of less important things.

What are we devoted to? How do we spend our time? What are our priorities? In the case of the new believers in Acts, we could say that they started a spiritual diet plan! A plan, I would guess, that was suggested to them by Peter and the other apostles.

And what was on the diet plan of this new, vibrant, excited church? Luke lists four things. First is “the apostles’ teaching.” Which is another way of saying “the Word,” as we have on our diet plan. Keep in mind that they didn’t yet have the “new” testament. They didn’t have the Gospels. Those hadn’t been written yet. But what they did have was in some ways even better. They had Jesus’ own disciples (now referred to as apostles)! Who presumably were teaching them everything that Jesus had said and done. Imagine how those new believers must have gobbled that up! Imagine how hungry they were to learn more about Jesus!

But secondly, Luke says, “they devoted themselves to fellowship.” The Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia*. Maybe you’ve heard of it. In addition to fellowship, it can also be translated as “community; togetherness, joint participation; generosity”; and get this definition: “close association involving mutual interests and sharing.” Sharing what? Luke elaborates. *All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.* So their sharing obviously included sharing their material resources and possessions. But it almost certainly also included sharing their very lives, their stories, their ups and downs, ins and outs, joys and sorrows, hopes and yearnings. And this was all done in a spirit of prayer. They invited God into all of their conversations, all of their sharing.

These are the things Luke says they were devoted to. They loved being together. They got energy and joy and excitement from one another. Once a week wasn’t enough. Luke says they got together every day! What he actually said was, “*Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God . . .*”

These people were on fire! Can you feel it? And did you catch how important eating together was? It was like one of their sacraments. For them, eating together was truly a “religious” experience. As if, every time they ate together, Jesus himself was with them!

One of the things that has impressed me about First Mennonite Church is how much you love to eat together. Pot luck, Pizza Hut, the menu doesn’t matter. Now we know why. It’s because whenever we eat together, Jesus himself is with us!

Luke says that “*Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.*” I love that word “awe.” It’s like saying they were blown away by everything that God kept doing in their midst, including in their very selves. Almost as if words sometimes weren’t adequate to fully express it. As if sometimes all they could do is just shake their heads, and raise their hands. Or maybe, burst out in song! Maybe that’s why we Mennonites love to sing so much when we’re together! Because words alone aren’t adequate to express what God is doing.

Luke says that they were constantly “*praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.*” All the people, he says. You see, every time these fired up new believers would come together (which was often) other people were watching. And what would they see? Amazing

generosity. Sharing. Excitement. Joy. “*And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*” Those who wanted what they obviously had.

Which should make us wonder, what does the world around us see whenever we come together? Generosity? Sharing? Excitement? Joy? Awe? This is fellowship! This is *koinonia*.

When I was a boy growing up, my parents both taught at the seminary in Elkhart. And I remember them talking about something they were both involved in called “K-groups.” “We’ve got our K-group tonight. We’ll be home late.” K, as it turns out, stood for *koinonia*. And apparently, everyone at the seminary—students, staff, and faculty alike—were in one of these K-groups. They were learning about the meaning of *koinonia*. They were practicing *koinonia*. Eating together. Singing together. Laughing together. Probably weeping together sometimes. Sharing together. Praying together.

We here at FMC have the “eating together” part down pat. And we’re quite good at singing together. But I would challenge you to work harder at the sharing together and praying together parts. You’re too private, too afraid. Afraid of what others will think of you, perhaps. Or maybe, afraid of the kind of honesty from others that may challenge you to make changes, perhaps even give some things up. And as for prayer, I think some of you might simply be afraid of doing it wrong. And you know what? In prayer, there ain’t no wrong. There’s just laying it all out there, for God and everyone to see.

I’m aware that some of you have been talking, and think it’s time to start a couple of K-groups here at FMC; or just call them “small groups,” or even “house churches” if you prefer. There’s a very important part of our spiritual diet that this church might just be lacking.

And by the way, when it comes to the size of our church, numbers don’t matter. What matters is what we do when we’re together. God will take care of the numbers. Day by day.

Amen.