

John 6:1-14  
Psalm 23  
April 3, 2011

## The Soul of Food

Let us pray: Blessed art Thou

O Lord Our God

King of the world,

Who bringest forth bread from the earth. Amen

Since a sermon, if it is a good one, is a feast on the word of God; I thought we might start this morning with a grace. This particular prayer is an ancient Jewish Blessing. It acknowledges that all food comes from God; and since all food comes from, God I am postulating that food is sacred and indeed has soul.

“Then Jesus took the loaves and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.” Their cup “ranneth” over. Jesus offered grace before he provided food for the 5000. Maybe he used the grace we just shared. Maybe he had another. The point is that grace before feast is an ancient custom and one that Jesus kept.

I think about food a lot; I’ll bet you do too. Sometimes when I’m not even hungry I engage in recreational pantry reconnoitering. Not

sure what I'm hunting for, just a little nosh; a little taste and texture sensation. Food is wonderful like that. It feeds you in so many ways. It occurs to me that I don't appreciate food enough. It occurs to me that I disconnect food from its soul. I take it for granted and dismiss its sacredness.

Let Us pray: We thank thee oh Lord

For these thy blessings

Which we are about to receive from thy bounty

Through Christ Our Lord. Amen

We use that one a lot at our house and I have heard several variations in other homes; yet sometimes our graces can be rather perfunctory and disconnected from their purpose. When we pray, we should mean it.

I think that food has soul. Through food we actually taste the goodness of God. God gives food two purposes. God gives us food so that we may delight in all its wonder and goodness, ( man there is nothing like a fresh tomato) and God gives us food so that we may share it. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Food For Life, The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating by L. Shannon Jung, Augsburg Fortress Press Minneapolis 2004 Page 43

The first point is that all food comes from God. “The basic biblical affirmation about food is that God is the Giver of our daily bread.”<sup>2</sup> Listen to these three verses from Psalm 104 “From the Sky you send the rain on the hills and the earth is filled with your blessings. You cause the grass to grow for the cattle and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine bread to strengthen the human heart.”<sup>3</sup> What you hear in this Psalm is a spirit of thankfulness and a spirit of connectedness to the land. Israel understood that God gave the land and from that land came food. We who shop in supermarkets are at risk of losing this connection to the land. I believe that if we lose our connection to the land, to the earth, we lose our connection to God. God is in the dirt or as Sally McFague author of a New Climate for Theology puts it , God is not [just] a being, then, but reality: God is the stuff out of which everything comes and to which it will return.” God is being-itself , or existence itself, the source of all other forms of existence<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Breaking Bread by Sara Covin Jungst, Westminster John Knox, Louisville 1992 , page 22

<sup>3</sup> ( 12-15 TEV and NRSV)

<sup>4</sup> Augsburg Fortress Press, 2008 page 164

One other necessary point - Israel had obviously not yet heard about Chocolate or it would assuredly been mentioned in this Psalm as a chief blessing.

The second point is that God who gives us food, gives it to us as a delight, something to be savored and enjoyed; Something beautiful and precious. Each of us has our favorite meals, our special dinners, our beloved dessert, our family traditions around birthdays and holidays and weekends, our “to die for” experiences, our specific memory of what a comfort food is. This is how God made creation. God made the earth good as we are told in Genesis, full of bounty for our behalf. God made the world so that our cup what ever we like in it, overflows with gastronomic wonder. God infused Godself in creation and in food.

You know what else – God made food beautiful. We have a saying in our house – “Now that’s a tomato.” Most of you know I am big time into gardening. Out of the hundreds of tomatoes I grow, only the top five percent get the “Now that’s a tomato” acclaim. Many foods are beautiful. Artists paint them and commercials spread them out before us in order to entice us and maybe we consider food beautiful because we like the way it tastes and because it nurtures us

and we have wonderful memories. But food is beautiful even as it grows. Aren't fields of wheat and corn just gorgeous to take in? How about a field of Sunflowers or even a beautiful green field of beans? God made food stunning because God is stunning. Food is God's gift and our delight. Through food we actually taste the kingdom of God.

Let Us Pray   The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord,  
                  and you give them their food in due season.  
                  You open wide your hand, and satisfy the needs of  
                  every living thing. Thanks be to you. Amen.

God gave us food so that we can delight. God gave us Food so that we can taste God's Kingdom and God gave us food so that we can share.

Fisher boy has five loaves and two fish; shares them with Jesus and from his generosity and this beginning there is a feast. A kid started it. Jesus blessed it and there is a massive marvel picnic. The feeding of the Five Thousand is the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four Gospels. There are variations that could indicate he blessed and shared food many times. In any case the point is that out of scarcity, Jesus provided abundance and that where there is paucity we can expect Jesus to provide profusion. It's the way he works. In the kingdom of God there is abundance. Whatever heaven is; it will include feasting.

So Thirdly God gave us food so that we can share and God gave us food to share in two ways. One, God expects us to share meals with others. Barriers fall down and bonds are strengthened at dinner. When we break bread with others, we share an intimacy, we share a gift, we share recipes and favorites, we share the miracle and bounty of God. Our tummies are filled and our hearts are strengthened. Friendships and love abound. It's a natural flow. Relationships are nurtured in shared meals.

Sara Miles in her Book *Take This Bread* writes of the Food Pantry she was called to start in the church's sanctuary after taking communion. It was a lot of hard work that required bunches of volunteers. After a few years it dawns on her that she and all the volunteers were working very hard all day with Food, yet they were taking their lunch break just before the clients came individually and spiritually alone. And so they started cooking soup and they set a table and ate together. Miles writes "In the Gospel, a stranger was revealed as Jesus in the "breaking of the bread." And so as we began to eat together, and as, over bread, I learned more about the lives of our volunteers, I began to pay attention, to see what kind of

community these strangers were building.”<sup>5</sup> When we share meals we share God’s bounty and we share lives. Because of this, remember how important the family meal is. You just can’t underestimate the power of the multiple levels of nurturing there is in the shared family meal. There are times to watch the boob tube and eat in front of the computer, but times face to face with family and friend at meal are a precious and holy gift.

Second point about sharing is that God expects us to share **food** with others as well as meals. A chief joy of gardening is the pleasure of sharing the extra with neighbor and friend. God pretty much makes it an imperative in scripture – we are commanded to share food with the poor the widow and the alien. We are commanded to share food with our friends and with the hungry. We support the West County Food Pantry, we support Sarah’s House and one Great Hour of Sharing because we don’t want others to be deprived of the delight and taste of God in Food. Part of discipleship is sharing God’s bounty.

Let us pray:        Give us grateful hearts, O God,  
                              for all your mercies,  
                              and make us mindful of the needs of others;  
                              through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Sara Miles, *Take This Bread*, Random House New York, 2007 page 207-9, quote 208

Part of faith is trusting in the abundance of God and that's not always easy. In fact often enough we catch ourselves hoarding God's blessings and keeping them for ourselves. Hoarding is the antithesis of sharing.

Do you remember what happened to the people of Moses who collected extra manna in the wilderness? Moses told them to only gather enough for each day – that God would provide for tomorrow; but they couldn't help themselves so they took more. Well these blessings went to rotting and got gooey in their back packs and they attracted worms. Sometimes when we hoard blessings they rot. Little parochial worms eat away at our hearts and we find selfishness in control. We think we are creating insurance and safety when in reality we are throwing up barriers. Sharing on the other hand is a double act of Spiritual Formation – the giver and the receiver are nurtured when God's abundance is spread around.

L Shannon Jung is Professor of Rural Ministry at the University of Dubuque And Wartburg Theological Seminary and Jung points out that when we short circuit God's intention for Food we are engaging in eating disorders. Food is a delightful Gift from God but when we

mismanage this gift the result is Obesity, anorexia, Bulimia, inequitable distribution, destruction of the land, poverty and starvation. He makes a connection between personal eating disorders and the Global Food Disorder. We are supposed to delight in food but not overindulge. We are supposed to share food, not hoard God's blessings. We are supposed to tend the land not destroy it. Wendell Berry Theologian, Farmer Poet and ecologist writes "To cherish what remains of the Earth and to foster its renewal is our only legitimate hope of survival."

There is much that's needs fixing when it comes to nutrition, diet, framing, and the distribution and the politics of Food - at the heart of all these problems including the one Billion people on our globe that are undernourished is our failure to truly understand food as God's gift and blessing for all people.

James writes this is his letter - If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food , and one of you says them go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill and yet you do not supply their bodily need, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works is dead."<sup>6</sup> If we see the soul of food, if we understand that God is in

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<sup>6</sup> James 2:15-17

Land and, if we understand that the kingdom of God is tasted and toasted as well as preached and longed for we will see that sharing a meal and sharing food are in fact basic Christian acts, a forms of prayer, types of evangelism, and the heart of mission and discipleship.

The Soul of God is in our Food. God invites us to delight and share.