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You Are What you Eat!

Somewhere during the first part of the last century, the phrase, “You are what you eat” became a popular way of naming the relationship between food and our physical (and even emotional) well-being. A nutritionalist named Victor Lindlahr started the whole thing back in the early 1920’s when he developed something called the “catabolic diet” (still popular today) and then wrote a book titled “*You Are What You Eat: How to Win and Keep Health with Diet*”. Lindlahr’s diet was developed in large part to treat diabetes by eliminating foods high in carbohydrates (such as breads and potatoes) and replacing them with fruits, vegetables that often require more calories to digest than they provide to the body. The resulting net loss of calories helped some people lose weight “three times faster than starvation”.

You are what you eat. Or perhaps in the case of this diet, it might be more true to say “You are **LESS** than what you eat”. But I think for the most part, Mr. Lindlahr got things right. There is a correlation between the food we put into our mouths and the health of our bodies. After all, the cells in our bodies are built and maintained with the compounds found in the food we eat. Although we won’t become turn into carrots if we eat too many of them - and no watermelons are likely to sprout when an occasional seed is swallowed - we cannot get away from the fact that in more ways than one, we are what we eat.

This is now the third Sunday where we have been talking about eating in the gospel lessons. In John’s gospel, Jesus is intent on feeding people. It began with thousands eating their fill of bread and fish multiplied from the small offering of a young boy’s lunch. Last week we heard that this was not enough for the people. They wanted some other sign, perhaps free food on a daily basis like their ancestors who ate manna while they journeyed in the wilderness for forty years. Jesus replies that the bread he is offering is different. Its purpose is more filling than temporary satisfaction of a full stomach. Jesus offers a new way of living where faith in him fully unites the believer with the creating and saving God who promised long ago to bless all nations.

Today we hear that all of this talk about living bread coming down from heaven through this person named Jesus has caused a good bit of grumbling among the people. Like their ancestors before them who complained to Moses, the people don't know what to make of what is before their eyes. It all seems too amazing and difficult to comprehend. *And in fact - it is.* Jesus says that no one can take this all in unless God **pulls** them along. It is God who teaches us and helps us to believe that Jesus offers unending life that begins right now. That is what verse 47 says. "Whoever believes HAS (present tense verb) eternal life. Not *will have* someday but **has** right now. The meal that we share in worship is a means by which this grace can become real to us. We eat and drink ordinary bread and wine but Christ is present "in, with, and under" these physical elements, feeding us with grace and mercy and love. If we are what we eat, then we too become like Jesus – filled with grace and mercy and love in a world that desperately needs this kind of nourishment. This meal nourishes us but it also *changes us*.

And that is exactly what the writer of Ephesians is talking about and because of events that will be unfolding in the weeks to come, I wanted to highlight these verses today. Because of Christ we are changed people. There is a "so then" a "therefore" a "what does this mean?" that results from the nourishment we have received. If we *are what we eat*, then Christ is present in us and through us. We speak honestly to one another for we belong to one another. We are a part of the same body, nourished with the same food. Will there still be conflict and disagreements? Of course but the one with whom we are angry is one for whom Jesus died and who also carries within him or her the presence of God. Our natural tendency is to separate into like-minded groups - to break relationships when it becomes difficult and to defend our position by going on the attack against others. But if we are what we eat, then we live as Christ lived. We build one another up with gracious words, regardless of the issue. We put away all wrath, and anger, and quarreling, and gossip, and instead we act with kindness and tenderness and above all forgiveness. We imitate God because in no small way, God has come to dwell inside of us.

In eight days, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will gather in Minneapolis MN to seek the Spirit's guidance and direction for this church. People from around the country have been in prayer for this gathering for the last 40 days because the issues we face together as a church are important, contentious, and difficult. Foremost among these is

how we understand the diversity that exists in human sexuality and how the message of God's Word, the message of Jesus Christ, informs and shapes this understanding. Even before the Assembly begins, "sides" are being drawn up – lines are being drawn in the sand that divide the one body we are all members of. I had an old professor who spoke a truth that I will never forget. "If you draw a diving line between you and another, you can be sure that Jesus is on the other's side".

Surely such divisions "grieve the Holy Spirit of God" and I urge all of us to join in prayer that this same Spirit will work to gather the fragments of Christ's body together and remind us again of who we are.

We are what we eat. We eat the body and blood of Jesus Christ who loved us and gave himself up for us so that we might become more than we ever imagined we could be. For those who believe this promise, eternal life awaits. Life that begins now and never ends - Life that has no fear and no place for fearful reactions – Life that offers new possibilities by the power of Christ within us.

So in the words of Pastor Barbara Cawthorne Crafton:

"Take and eat, Jesus says, and let your simple bread become me. Don't let a single thing in your life, however ordinary a thing it may be, remain untouched by your new life in me. Don't think for a moment that it is an ordinary thing; there are no ordinary things. Allow your eternal life to transform *this* life, so that the two are one thing, a seamless garment."