

Eat Whether or Not You Think You are Hungry

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me shall never hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.’” (John 6:35, Modern English Version)

I could be wrong, but I suspect that a dietician would not tell someone, especially someone seeking to lose weight, to eat when not hungry (and I suspect that a physician may make the same recommendation). I certainly have no intention of calling such advice into question or dedicating this month’s newsletter to an issue that I’m not qualified to evaluate. But I do wish to discuss the subject of eating from a spiritual point of view.

You’ve probably heard me in the past compare & contrast the feeding of our bodies to the feeding of our souls. For being fed spiritually is something that we should continuously be mindful of. For you and I obviously give a great amount of attention to feeding our bodies each and every day. In fact, if we neglect to do so, we will not only be plagued by hunger in a short period of time, but in a matter of days and weeks we could become ill, weak, and eventually die if we fail to nourish (and hydrate) our bodies.

And see, what is true for us physically is also true spiritually. The difference is that the same triggers in our bodies that tell us that we need food don’t tell our souls that we need spiritual nourishment. Oh, even unbelievers can sense a lack of purpose and meaning in their lives – a hungering for something beyond this material world. But the Bible tells us that the sinful nature with which we entered this world (an inherited fallen nature that is the result of our first parents’ rebellion toward the Creator and rejection of Him) has left human beings blind when it comes to God, at odds with Him, absorbed with self, and spiritually dead. Any sort of innate desire to instinctively reach out toward God or to submit to Him has been fatally corrupted – not merely bruised or injured. This is why many, many people in this world are perfectly content to not pursue God. This may flabbergast a Christian but it really shouldn’t if the believer understands what Holy Scripture says about the deadly condition of mankind because of sin.

Thankfully, our Maker didn’t leave human beings in this fallen state – namely, separated from Him (which is a state of death). For our Creator Himself rectified the problem for us. He destroyed that which disconnects us from Himself. For God sent His very own Son as one of us to overcome our sin. God Himself took our human flesh (John 1:14) to pay the price of our rebellion – suffering the punishment, the Hell & death, that our actions have wrought. He accomplished this at the cross where He voluntarily laid down His life in place of ours – as our substitute. And three days later He bodily rose again. His resurrection shows that He has conquered our sin, as well as defeated Satan and death itself. We are now reconciled to God. We are saved. And the Lord now delivers this salvation to us today through His Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

And see, God must provide us with His saving nourishment and the hunger for it. And that He does. For His Word of the Law shows us our problem and our need of rescue. And God’s Word of the Gospel reveals God’s saving work in Christ and delivers it to us – even generating the faith to receive the forgiveness, salvation, and new & unending life that He offers.

But this hunger and this nourishment are not merely one-time events. Like the food and liquid that our bodies need, so too, the Christian continuously needs Jesus. Sadly, some believers become lax and choose to go on long fasts when it comes to God's Word and Sacraments. Yet, Jesus' words in John 6 ought to be heeded by believer and unbeliever alike: ***“Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53, Modern English Version).*** And St. Paul wrote: ***“For many are walking in such a way that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ. I have told you of them often and tell you again, even weeping. Their destination is destruction, their god is their appetite, their glory is in their shame, their minds are set on earthly things” (Philippians 3:18-19, Modern English Version).***

Sadly, some who are baptized into Christ choose to follow the way of unbelievers. But Christians ought not hunger after and consume the food of the world. This doesn't mean that Christians aren't to live in the world. For we ought and we must live in the world. It also doesn't mean that we can't enjoy the things that God provides for us in this world – including material things. But we aren't to be *of* the world – we are not to be disciples of this fallen world's teachings and practices. For Christians eat a different meal – we partake of Christ and find our meaning, purpose, guidance, life, and hope in Him. For Jesus said: ***“I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. The bread which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh” (John 6:51, Modern English Version).***

My friends, the nourishment that the world offers our souls is far different than what God offers. And unlike the physical nourishment with which we feed our bodies in this world, we can't overeat the Gospel food that the Lord offers. We also will not be deprived of the Gospel's nourishment if we share it with others – in fact, the Gospel that we tell others strengthens and comforts us as we ourselves again hear the Good News that we are proclaiming to others. For Christians cannot hear the Gospel too often or dine at the Communion rail too much. Therefore we never ought to believe that receiving Christ is harmful if we do so in faith and while rightly apprehending God's Word.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, a lack of hunger for Christ and His gifts comes from unbelief, not from faith. Nevertheless, you and I sin daily - hungering for what does not benefit us spiritually and may even harm us spiritually. All too often we suppress and fail to recognize our ongoing need for Jesus and the forgiveness, deliverance, and everlasting life that He alone offers. In regard to our need for Jesus and the gracious gifts He offers in the Lord's Supper, Martin Luther wrote: ***“But if you say, ‘What, then, shall I do if I cannot feel such distress or experience hunger and thirst for the Sacrament?’ Answer, ‘For those who are of such a mind that they do not realize their condition I know no better counsel than that they put their hand into their shirt to check whether they have flesh and blood.’” (The Large Catechism, Part 5, Line 75. Quoted in Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, Second Edition. Concordia Publishing House, Copyright 2006, p. 439).*** For see, we who are alive in this world have a sinful flesh (which will only be destroyed at the death of the body). Therefore, we continuously need God's grace in Christ as we journey through this life.

So my fellow saints, we go to the Word daily. We attend worship services and Bible classes when they are offered. We receive the Holy Supper. For whether or not we are rightly feeling hunger for God and His grace, we need them. The One who knows us better than we know ourselves tells

us that we need what He alone offers. For we sin every day and need God to absolve and strengthen us as we await the day we enter with Him into glory. For the nourishment that God provides is one of a kind, and comes only from Him. For He gives life which never ends. He is *“the bread of life. Whoever comes to [Him] shall never hunger, and whoever believes in [Him] shall never thirst”* (John 6:35, Modern English Version).

See you at church as we gather to be fed by Christ our Savior,
Pastor

Psalm Readings for August

WEEK ONE: **Sunday, August 06; PSALM 39; Monday, August 07; PSALM 40; Tuesday, August 08; PSALM 41; Wednesday, August 09; PSALM 42; Thursday, August 10; PSALM 43; Friday, August 11 ; PSALM 44; Saturday, August 12; PSALM 45**

WEEK TWO: **Sunday, August 13; PSALM 46; Monday, August 14; PSALM 47; Tuesday, August 15; PSALM 48; Wednesday, August 16; PSALM 49; Thursday, August 17; PSALM 50; Friday, August 18; PSALM 51; Saturday, August 19; PSALM 52**

WEEK THREE: **Sunday, August 20; PSALM 53; Monday, August 21; PSALM 54; Tuesday, August 22; PSALM 55; Wednesday, August 23; PSALM 56; Thursday, August 24; PSALM 57; Friday, August 25; PSALM 58; Saturday, August 26; PSALM 59**

WEEK FOUR: **Sunday, August 27; PSALM 60; Monday, August 28; PSALM 61; Tuesday, August 29; PSALM 62; Wednesday, August 30; PSALM 63; Thursday, July 31; PSALM 64; Friday, September 01; PSALM 65; Saturday, September 02; PSALM 66**