



August 5, 2017 - Sharing Food & Space

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

(see Is 55:1-5)

Given by Pastor Mattei

The introduction to the service instructs us so: In today's first reading God invites all who are hungry or thirsty to receive food and drink without cost. Jesus feeds the hungry multitude and reveals the abundance of God. At the Eucharistic table we remember all who are hungry or poor in our world today. As we share the bread of life, we are sent forth to give ourselves away as bread for the hungry.

It's no secret that Lutherans like to eat. We have food virtually at any gathering. We understand how important food is not only to nourish our bodies but also to foster our social connections. Food manifests our willingness to sit together in the same space and find something to share and make the whole experience of putting ourselves out there less painful.

When visiting with someone from a different cultural background or traveling abroad I enjoy trying different foods out of curiosity but also as a way of honoring another person's place of origin. Going to seminary with people from eight different nations I enjoyed appreciating different tastes and learning from others the cultural origins of their food. I felt closer to them as I did so. Just as I am surprised to learn that there are people who would not try anything unfamiliar.

Food is crucial for development. There are plenty of articles on the impact of food scarcity on millions of people around the globe. "Food insecurity is part of a continuum that includes hunger (food deprivation), malnutrition (deficiencies, imbalances, or excesses of nutrients), and famine. Long-term lack of food security eventually becomes hunger... On a population level, extreme lack of food security becomes famine."¹

"Hunger and health are deeply connected. People who are food insecure are disproportionately affected by diet-sensitive chronic diseases such as diabetes and high

¹ <http://www.sustainabletable.org/280/food-security-food-access>

blood pressure, and according to research, food insecurity is also linked to many adverse effects to overall health.”² “ Kids who don’t get enough to eat — especially during their first three years — begin life at a serious disadvantage. When they’re hungry, children are more likely to be hospitalized and they face higher risks of health conditions like anemia and asthma. And as they grow up, kids struggling to get enough to eat are more likely to have problems in school and other social situations.”³

I remember seeking an answer to a very troubling question when I was in seminary preparing for ministry. As I was being shaped academically and spiritually I knew mentally and in my heart that the Word of God is like milk that leads me to salvation⁴ and solid food, which instructs me in wisdom and molds my character.⁵ The Word of the Lord is like honey (Ezekiel 3:3; Rev. 10:9), indeed sweeter than honey (Psalm 19). I took God’s invitation to feed myself on the Word of Life as fundamental to anyone wanting to come closer to the mind of God and enjoy fullness of life. Yet, I could not and still can’t see myself preaching to the hungry crowd that what they basically need is the Word of God. How arrogant of me? How insensitive and ignorant of people’s hardship.

God does tell us that his love is available to all who seek him and invites us to take him in freely like food at no cost (Isaiah 55) but Jesus does charge *us* to feed the hungry (Matthew 14). Preaching the Good News requires that we be attentive to the context of the listeners. They will know the love of God by the way we relate to them and take their plea seriously. This act of attentiveness stimulates our curiosity; it moves us out of our secure emotional space and gets us involved and connected: it empowers us to understand the world of those who suffer and to have a better perspective on how to be in solidarity. Until we share food and space, we may not have a clue.

Way too many times we Christians have insulated ourselves behind Bible studies and holy rituals. Worse yet, we have used the Word of God to judge and to condemn in self-righteous posture. Not only have we not sought the Spirit in the Word, we have blocked our ears from hearing the outrage of God at our insensitivity towards those who suffer abuse and exclusion, and ignored the prophetic challenge to respond to the cry of the poor. Christians would do better to look at the social collapse manifested in so many people at war and displaced around the globe and refuse to accept it as normal. We Christians would feed many if we learned to share space with those who suffer, those whom first world societies declare unwanted: why, even Jesus’ disciples wanted to send them away! (Matthew 14:15)

² <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger/?referrer=https://www.google.com/>

³ <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/child-hunger-facts.html>

⁴ 1 Peter 2:2-5. To Paul milk is drink to be given to infants in the faith as in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

⁵ Hebrews 5:14

May we learn to love and fear God so that we may become aware of the abundant blessings that God lavishes upon us. We may think we have little to offer, but have we tried putting it in Jesus' hands? Who knows, we may be part of God's mission to save.