

Food for Thought

I Cor. 11:23-26; Genesis 1:27-29

When I was a child, many years ago, I didn't like eating fish. In an effort to encourage me to eat fish my grandmother used to explain to me that fish was "brain food." If I wanted to be smart, she would say, you have to eat fish. I still wouldn't eat a whole lot of fish. That's probably what explains my present condition.

At another point on this "brain food" spectrum was my Great Aunt Lina Hall. Her contention was that I needed to read a lot. She would give me books ... all kinds of books. She had been a teacher. She believed that reading was the key to brain development. Strictly speaking, it was not the brain she was concerned about developing ... it was my mind. I enjoyed reading. Still do. Maybe that helped compensate for the lack of fish.

When I began to become interested in theology, I discovered another avenue by which my mind was nurtured and I commend it to you for your consideration. It is in thoughtfully contemplating the great theorems of religious belief. It not only stretches your mind, it also helps you develop your own belief system, that which can that help hold your life together. For example, if you want to really stretch your mind, think about a God possessed of infinite resourcefulness. That means God can accomplish wondrous things far beyond our own comprehension. Even if we eat a lot of fish.

If we carry this one step further, God has sought to develop and maintain an intentional relationship with us. Why in the world would an infinitely capable God choose to relate to us? It's another overwhelming concept called Redemptive Love, as exemplified in Jesus. God provided Jesus in order to be able to reclaim us in spite of what we sometimes become, if we choose to relate to Jesus and to God repentantly and with a willingness to become what God would have us become: partners in what God is about in the world.

Each time we join together to participate in the sacrament of communion, we are reminded of that Redemptive Love. Each time we eat the bread and drink from the cup, the symbolism of the act becomes a reminder of the sacrifice made by an individual two thousand years ago that still has effects today in our own lives and in the lives of those who share this table with us, wherever they might be, in whatever language the sacrament is offered, of whatever ethnic group, in whatever land regardless of the setting or condition in which they live.

The bread and the juice of the grape are powerfully simple symbols of the life that was destroyed on the cross. Not just of a destroyed life, but of the dimensions of that life when he lived: his teachings, his living example, his personal struggle to get people to grasp what it was he represented. And it was a struggle. Even those who were closest to him did not fully grasp what he was about. Many of them understood the concept of "Messiah" to mean a fighting leader who would free the Jewish people from their bondage. But instead it was all about love! Not for just one group of people but for all people. Love your enemies! Do good to those who persecute you! What kind of nonsense was that for the Messiah to teach?

But the significance of the Redemptive Love of God again enters the picture, for that life was not destroyed! Death was not the end of the story. His life examples and his teachings, his sacrifice on the cross, would live on throughout the centuries. They would become the gospel that would reach out into the world. God has provided what we need.

In the Genesis passages that were read this morning, the writer that was explaining how God created everything, tells us what had been given to us that we need for life to be sustained. “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed ... every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.” Perhaps God intended that we should be vegetarians.

God also makes a statement that reveals something of our nature that goes beyond body and mind. It is one of the most profound statements in scriptures: “So God created humans in God’s own image ...” I can recall the phrase I learned in Sunday School: “God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” If we believe that God is spirit, then to be created in God’s image must mean that we are, at least in some aspect, spiritual beings as well as bodily and thinking creatures. It is that spiritual essence of each of us that the sacrament of communion can help to nurture. We are children of God. We need more than food and drink as we commonly think of them. We need this gift that symbolizes the opportunity to be redeemed and reclaimed by God. We need to be reminded.

The sacrament of communion is both commemoration and inspiration. We remember the last supper Jesus shared with his disciples not long before his crucifixion. We remember his words that identified the bread and the wine as symbols for his body and blood. We remember what followed that supper, in the garden of Gethsemane, before the authorities, and at Golgotha. And, of course, we recall the Easter morning scene and what followed.

But it is also a source of inspiration. From the Latin usage it is a word that literally means “to breath into.” Recall the old hymn, “Breathe on me Breath of God.” Written by Edwin Hatch around 1878 in England, it contains familiar words:

*Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew ...
Breathe on me, breath of God, until my heart is pure ...*

The question I would pose for you this morning is this: of what will you be thinking as you accept this bread and this cup? There is no magic in taking them into our bodies. There is only an effect in our lives if we receive them as nurturing symbols for our spiritual hunger. We do this by receiving them thoughtfully and prayerfully. There was a confession made during the service this morning that includes the line “Transform us by your spirit and make us new.” That transformation can only take place if we intentionally accept the influence of God’s spirit in our lives.

One of the unfortunate fringe effects of some of the things we do in the name of religion is becoming so familiar with them that we do them without giving them any thought: repeating the Lord’s Prayer, reciting the responses that are used over and over, doing things that have become ritual without depth. The sacrament of communion can become a “by rote” exercise that somehow seems good, but without lasting impact on what we are becoming. I remember seeing

a Tibetan prayer wheel in a museum. It looked like a small water wheel with slots around the perimeter into which cards could be inserted. On each card was written a simple prayer. The belief was that when the wind caused the wheel to turn, the prayers were sent toward the deity being worshipped. No human was needed. The wind did all the work. I suspect that those things we do in the name of religion, when they become so routine that they border on becoming meaningless because we don't think about what we're doing, is about as effective in bringing about newness in our lives as the prayer wheel is.

You will hear the traditional invitation to partake of this sacred meal. It has come down to us over the centuries and through many generations. Don't allow it to become so familiar that it has little effect. Think about what is happening here. Think about the implications of the words you are repeating. Think about what it might mean to be made new. At this table there is food for the spirit. As we partake, may our prayer be "Inspire me, God, breath on me that I may grow into life anew."