

You Are What You Eat

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the Rev. Karen Millard
Proverbs 9:1-6
1 Kings 2:1-12; 3:3-14
Ephesians 5:15-20
John 6:51-58

Have you ever found yourself caught up in the rush of life? Have you ever found yourself hungry for nourishment but you don't have time to stop? You know you could go home and make a salad or a healthy sandwich but there the McDonalds Arch stands and your car turns into the drive-thru and you get a quick fix. It may not be healthy but its food. It may not be nourishing but it will fill you up.

Now, imagine yourself in today's proverb. You are walking along a busy, dirty, cluttered street. You are tired and hungry. You are lost in every sense of the word. You're broke, jobless, lifeless, goalless, and desperate. You turn the corner and there in the center of the busy marketplace stands Lady Wisdom. You can tell she's wise, just by the way she dresses, simple but appropriate. And she calls out to you and everyone else, beckoning you to join her in a lavish feast. She tells you she has prepared a wonderful spread of fresh-baked bread, roast lamb and fine wines. She encourages you and others to leave your impoverished confusion and come to be nourished in life. Come journey with me she say's, come this way and "Walk up the street to a life with meaning."¹ But the journey to her home is up a hill, it's a bit of a climb and although she is willing to assist you on your way you ponder.

Because, you hear another voice, a more familiar one calls out. You've seen lady Folly before, and you know what to expect. She also invites you to dine with her. She welcomes the simple to come and feast on stolen water and secret bread. She intrigues you. Madam foolishness unlike Lady Wisdom is "brazen and frivolous, she sits on the front porch of her house on Main Street, and as people walk by minding their own business, calls out, "Are you confused about life, don't know what's going on? Steal off with me, (she says) I'll show you a good time! You won't have a care in the world. (No one will ever know and) I'll give you the time of your life."² Come on she says, it'll be fun. This seems a lot simpler doesn't it? There is no journey to take, and no expectations of being proper or wise. No preparations, nothing...so you consider turning in.

The only thing is something in your gut reminds you that the proverb warns us that we "don't know about all the skeletons in her closet, (see, what you don't know is) that all her guests end up in hell."³

¹ The Message Proverbs 9:6

² The Message Proverbs 9:13-17

³ The Message Proverbs 9: 18

Wisdom in our scriptures helps us discern between good and evil, right from wrong. Wisdom is about participating in the desires of God for us that we might fully live. Wisdom is what Solomon requested of God that he might discern, listen well and judge rightly. Solomon's great wisdom is understood as a gift from God just as wisdom is a gift throughout all of scripture. Wisdom as we understand it however is not only a gift given to Kings, but to all who faithfully seek it. Proverbs 2:1-6 says "My child, if you accept my words and treasure up my commandments within you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; if you indeed cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding; if you seek it like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures – then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord Gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding"⁴

Wisdom will be given to those who seek it, but it can't be sought simply for personal gain. Wisdom always involves life in community, a life directed by God. Wisdom is found by participating with God and one another in life. Proverbs 9:10 tells us "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."⁵

Perhaps Solomon knew that, and perhaps his life speaks to ours more clearly than any other because Solomon like his father David before him is a complex character. We know him for his wisdom and glory but he also was filled with flaws. Solomon when seeking wisdom from God without self importance ruled well but when pride snuck in and began to dominate he found himself no longer in the presence of Holy wisdom. Kathy Schifferdecker suggests "Solomon is like our own leaders, a mixture of good and bad. Solomon is, in other words, like us—all of us saints and sinners at the same time. Perhaps his story, then, can inform our own stories.

*In listening to the dream of Solomon we are sparked to ask "What would you wish for if you could wish for anything?" Solomon, for all his shortcomings later in life, answers well. He wishes not for personal gain or material possessions, but for a listening heart, a discerning mind, and the wisdom to govern his people well. For these attributes, Solomon becomes in later biblical tradition the epitome of wisdom and a well-loved king."*⁶

Do we seek wisdom? Do we seek to be nourished by the Holy? Do we have time for wisdom, nourishment, discernment?

I think we need to ask ourselves these questions as we begin to enter into a new year of ministry together. I found myself being called back to deep practice this week. Personal goal setting, discerning, studying and prayer. I found my self in a place where potentially I could be quick and reactive to things going on in my personal life and in the life of the

⁴ NRSV Proverbs 2:1-6

⁵ NRSV Proverbs 9:10

⁶ Schifferdecker Kathryn, Assistant Professor of Old Testament Luther Seminary St. Paul, MN – reflection in textweek.com

UCC. I had people coming in to the church potentially reactive and questioning what is going on in this United Church of Ours and rightly so. I broke into the frenzy of attempting to read every article and listen to every podcast the GC was putting out. And although I knew I needed to be informed I also knew I needed to be wise, to sit back and wait, to trust the movement of the spirit amongst the many I knew in the room and when each of the decisions came back I was reminded that as we sit in the presence of The holy or as we ‘return to the potters house’ (the theme of the General Council) we will be able to discern wisely.

Perhaps this week we are called to be reminded of the need for consistent nourishment.

Why is it we understand so clearly that we need healthy food, and exercise but we forget we need to be spiritually nourished? One author writes “Perhaps we have forgotten "Give us this day, our daily bread" And that the wanderers in the desert were to gather that bread daily! Is (God) not saying to them and to us that we need Spiritual Sustenance each and every day, and that we like those who gathered the manna, cannot gather enough for tomorrow? They could not accurately describe or name it, but they knew they needed it to live!”⁷

Many of us tend to starve ourselves of spiritual nourishment and not even realize it. At times we don’t even know what we hunger for. We might even find ourselves getting into a daily routine of bible reading or devotions, perhaps even prayer, but we don’t allow it or expect it to change or lives – we just do it because we have been taught somewhere along the line it’s a good idea.

Here is the wisdom we find in our gospel this morning. Jesus is teaching us where we can find food for our spiritual hunger. He is telling us that it is only by making The Holy an integral part of who we are that we will be filled with life. Jesus says he is the food that will nourish and become a part of us that we may live abundantly and eternally.

It seems here the writer of the gospel and/or Jesus is kicking it up a notch. Jesus is saying come to the wisdom banquet and feast on the presence of God. Wisdom is more than just believing in the presence of God it is being nourished and feed by that presence. Jesus in this portion of scripture is the provision of the radical presence of God. Christ is the absolute provision for what we need.

The language and imagery here is graphic, even offensive not only to us here today but “The utter realism of eating flesh and drinking blood was shocking to Jesus’ hearers, as it would be today if taken literally. (Imagine the shocked reaction if a chalice of blood was placed on a table next to a chalice of *wine or juice*, simply to bring home the “transformation.”) Talk of flesh and blood is meant to shock and to bring home the realism of the full humanity of Jesus. John clearly understands these terms symbolically

⁷ I liked this piece and had it in my notes but unfortunately lost the reference.

or “sacramentally.” ...Here the shocking language and startled reaction of the audience serve as a challenge to believers to affirm the seemingly impossible.”⁸

You see, for the Semitic mind the word flesh would have been equated with personhood and blood equaled life. People would have understood the depth of the symbol. Jesus is saying that to be nourished by God is to find life. The translation is actually softened in English. In verse 53 Jesus referees to the Greek word ‘trogo’ meaning to ‘munch’ or ‘gnaw.’ It is graphic and urgent, even desperate. This is eating as if your life depended upon it.

What if we came to our faith or to communion in a way in which we knew the nourishment it offered would save our lives? Or even more than that, what if we believed feeding on Jesus gave us our very lives. I know Roy spent much time on explaining the different understandings of communion thorough out history and denominations so I am not going to get into that. (You can read his sermon on the website if you like). What I will say is that in our tradition there is a symbolic understanding that for us the Bread and wine, through the power and spirit of God, become for us what Jesus really is. And if we are faithful and committed, we become that which we eat and are nourished by. We become fully who God has created us to be.

You are what you eat is a comfortable idea for us. One might even say we live what we love or where our treasure is there is our heart. So it makes sense that we are what we eat or digest spiritually as well. We do need to be cautious of what we eat and digest spiritually for the health of our souls. No longer being in a ‘churched’ world we have so many so called life-giving offers to nourish us. We can be fed by materialism, greed, power, selfishness, all of these are options of things to live for today. All things many of us choose over and over. Many of these things I would equate with a fast food diet. Many of these things are things that draw us in like the golden arches, and we feast on them for a time until we find ourselves broke, sickly, and unhappy with who we have become. But being properly nourished, going to a banquet or a feast takes some preparation. You might have to prepare the food, or at least prepare yourself for the event. You might even want to dress up a little even. The food we are nourished by is important but even more important is the host and the guests that surround us. Here we are not only nourished but we are hosted and welcomed by Jesus.

Dianne Bergant sums up today’s lesson by saying “Wisdom spreads out a banquet to which we all are invited. The meat and wine that she offers is insight and understanding, and we would be fools to turn down her invitation. Jesus too spreads a banquet before us. He offers us himself, his flesh for the life of the world. If we turn down his invitation, we would be more than fools. We would be rejecting life itself.”⁹

⁸ Donahue, John R. professor of New Testament studies at the Jesuit School of Theology and Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California. Textweek.com

⁹ Bergant, Dianne

Are we prepared to reject life? I think sometimes we are. I know that in counseling I see people choose this all the time. Okay if I'm honest sometimes it's what I chose. Because doing the wise thing, living wisely is rarely the easy way, being nourished and fed by the Christ will mean taking time to be nourished. Living wisely rarely involves quick fixes, it requires patience and discernment. The result Jesus offers us is life abundant.

Wisdom is not for a select few, all are invited to the wisdom feast. All are invited to dwell in a lifelong, neverending process of abiding with God. This wisdom as Solomon teaches requires a listening heart and an understanding mind that we may discern between good and evil. All are invited by Jesus to eat and drink in the spirit in faith. We are welcomed to draw life from the life of Jesus. We are welcomed to eat this bread, drink this cup and be nourished to life.

I'm going to invite us now to take a moment as Carol plays to seek nourishment to discern where God is calling you to be fed. You may discover a nudge to get more involved in church, you may feel led to your family, you may discern a need for other forms of renewal in your life. Listen to our wise God as we pray.

Holy Wisdom we say we come longing to know more of you but we rarely take the time. Help us pause together now in this time and place. Open our hearts to listen open our minds to understand, open us up to discern where you would have us be and grow as individuals and as a church. We take time to meditate now together...