

“A Taste of Heaven”

John 6:25-35 • Exodus 16:14-31

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • October 2, 2016

I have to tell you it's funny how sermons work out sometimes. This morning we are in the third message in a series on using our senses to know God better. Several weeks ago when we looked at the parable of the sower we talked about our hearing. Jesus said hearing and responding to the gospel is like cultivating the ground in order to plant seeds. He then said that those of us who hear him will do what he says. Then two weeks ago we talked about our vision and our ability to see the Kingdom of God. Wherever God's will is done, wherever the church is working to restore what was lost in the fall, there is the Kingdom of God and we need the kind of vision that comes from knowing the Word of God to be able to see it.

The funny thing about this series is that I didn't realize I was doing a series until I was half way through it. Maybe I wasn't listening to God or maybe I just couldn't see it. But here we are and so today I want to talk about the sense of taste. You probably don't think about using your taste buds in order to know God better but the truth is that God has designed all of your senses to draw you closer to Him. The Bible actually has a number of passages that show us that taste and food is important to our relationship with God. Our Call to Worship from Psalm 34 says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." The context of that verse is that God will provide food for us and that when we taste it we will know how good God is. Psalm 19 says "the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul." A few lines later it says, "the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether...sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb."

In the New Testament, the kingdom of God is described in several places as a banquet. For example, in Matthew chapter 22 Jesus tells a parable saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son." And in Luke 13 Jesus says, "People will come from east and west, and from north

and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God." In Revelation 19, the angel says, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb." This is the marriage of Jesus and the church. I'm constantly amazed by people who claim to be followers of Jesus but who have no interest in His church. The parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22 is a stern reminder of how important the Church is to Jesus. In the parable, the invited guests all refuse to attend the feast. They have other things they consider more important. The king says, "The wedding feast is ready but those invited were not worthy." As we will see in a moment, when we gather to worship, especially when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are participating in the wedding banquet. When we are in real Christian community we get a *taste* of what heaven is like.

You may be asking yourself, "what does this have to do with tasting food?" Plenty! It seems to me that, like our other senses, our taste buds help point us to God, and it has to do with joy. Good food is enjoyable. We all have favorite foods – something we like better than anything else. Maybe your favorite is a good steak or seafood or maybe you really like sweets. Now, you don't have to eat good food to survive. We enjoyed living in Pittsburgh, but it wasn't because of the food. Flavor is optional. God gave us all taste buds so that we could *enjoy* our food. God created flavor. Just like He created beauty for us to see and melody and harmony for us to hear and enjoy.

In the book of Nehemiah, some of the exiles have returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall around the city. When the wall is completed they all gather to hear Ezra read from the Book of the Law. As he read the Scriptures they were convicted of their sin and began to weep. Nehemiah told them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is

holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” There’s that connection between eating good food and the joy of the Lord. He’s saying, “This is a holy day. Go eat choice foods and drink sweet wine, and share with people who don’t have any. Because the joy that comes from your meal is the strength of God.”

Let me just point out, though, that this is not a license to eat whatever you want whenever you want. The difference between the kind of eating described here and sinful eating has to do with your heart. It depends on your motivation. You can certainly eat rich food without drawing closer to God. But if you recognize the source of your joy – that it’s the God who gave you the ability to taste, not the food itself – then you will indeed find yourself worshipping.

A good example of this comes from our reading this morning from John 6. This passage comes right after the feeding of the 5000 with only five loaves and two fish. During the night Jesus crossed the lake walking on the water. The next morning the crowd that had eaten the miracle meal went looking for him. They had eaten a good meal served by Jesus but apparently they had not come any closer to God. Jesus said, “you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” The people wanted Jesus for the food he gave them. They wanted him for the healings he performed. They wanted Jesus for his elegant teaching. Today many people show up at churches for the music or the charismatic preaching or even for the food. They show up for what the church provides and when another church offers a better product, off they go.

Jesus warned the crowd and he warns us, “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.” The crowd, like many people in our country today, was not satisfied. They wanted more. They have just experienced miracle after miracle and then they say, “what sign do you do, that we may see and

believe you?” Then they say, “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” They sure had short memories. It was only the evening before that Jesus had fed them miraculously with bread. And now they seem to have forgotten.

It’s ironic that they bring up the story of the manna. As we heard a few minutes ago, a big part of that story is that the Israelites repeatedly disobeyed God’s commands concerning the manna. He told them to only collect what they needed for that day. Many tried to collect extra and it went bad over night. God told them to collect double the day before the Sabbath so that it could be a day of rest. But some tried to go collect manna on the Sabbath but there wasn’t any. At one point God says to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?” We know now that the honest answer would have been, “a long time.” But God was faithful to provide despite the complaints and unfaithfulness. Notice, too, verse 31 that describes the manna. “It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.”

Jesus is patient with this crowd, too. He says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said, “Sir, give us this bread *always*.” They still don’t get it. You and I will never truly understand worship until we know Jesus deep down in our souls and are satisfied with him alone, not with what he provides. Sometimes God has to strip away all of the so-called “benefits” of our religion in order to bring us to our knees, until there is nothing left. When the only thing you have left is Jesus, you will find that Jesus is not only enough, he is *everything*. It’s then that you stop following Jesus for what he provides and start following him because you want to be with him. That’s when you will truly worship Christ.

Jesus tells them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." We will be reminded of that in a few moments when we share the bread and juice in the Lord's Supper. John Calvin said that just as bread nourishes our bodies, Christ nourishes our soul. When we participate in communion we are nourished spiritually. Time spent with Jesus is life-giving. It changes our desires and our priorities. As we move into our time of

communion and the remainder of this worship service, I want to invite you right now to set aside all your personal desires, all your thoughts about the music and the preaching and the lights and the air conditioning and what time it is and just focus on Jesus. Just be present with him. Ask him to be present with you. Let him be enough. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Amen.