

A Banquet for our Souls

- I. It's not junk food, that offers no satisfaction
- II. Rather, it's a free meal, for those who will listen

55 *"Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.
2 Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.
3 Give ear and come to me;
listen, that you may live.
I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
my faithful love promised to David.
4 See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
a ruler and commander of the peoples.
5 Surely you will summon nations you know not,
and nations you do not know will come running to you,
because of the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel,
for he has endowed you with splendor."*

Tell me, when was the last time you ate something you knew was not very healthy? Maybe you had a bad case of the munchies, so you stop at Kwik Trip and there's an aisle of snack food that carries the brand name, URGE. And you're thinking, "Don't mind if I do." And you end up downing a whole bag of BBQ potato chips. Or you have a craving for your favorite flavor of ice cream. You were going to eat one spoonful. But before you know it, you've polished off a whole quart of it. Or you just can't take your mind off of those Krispy Kreme donuts. And so when you get a chance to eat one, well, you don't eat just one. In each case, those foods tasted so good in the moment. They satisfied your craving. But in the end, they didn't leave you feeling better. Chances are, they left you feeling worse. Maybe physically worse. Maybe they gave you an upset stomach, or raised your cholesterol, or cause your blood sugar to spike. Or maybe it just left you feeling "Blah." (I think that's a medical term, isn't it? Blah.) But eating junk food doesn't just affect us physically. Often, it affects us emotionally. It leaves us feeling bad about ourselves. It gives us a poor self-image. We're thinking, "Man, why did I eat that?" In the end, what we thought was going to be so satisfying, wasn't that satisfying at all. It put us in an even worse place than we were before.

Well, you realize that the same thing is true, not only of the things we put in our stomachs, but also the things we put into our hearts. There's a lot of junk food in our world

today. Things that we're tempted to crave. Things that we think will meet our needs, fulfill our desires, and satisfy our hunger. In the end, it turns out to be just junk. It may give us a short-term high, but in the end it leaves us feeling empty, bitter, and sad.

Fortunately for us, God, in his Word, offers us a much healthier diet to live on. A diet that ultimately meets our needs and satisfies our cravings, not only for the short-term, but for eternity. In our text for today, God invites us to come to a spiritual banquet. It's an all you can eat buffet. And best of all, it's all completely paid for. God, in effect, says, "Christian, if you're hungry, if you're thirsty, then "Come and get it." Today God offers us what we might call

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Rather, II. It's a free meal, for those who will listen.

The words that we have before us today were written by the prophet Isaiah about 700 BC. Isaiah was writing to the southern tribes of Judah in the years before they were taken into captivity by the Babylonians because of their rebellion against God. And so most of this book is a call to repentance. Isaiah warns his people about the consequences of turning away from God and chasing after the things of this world. In Isaiah chapter 5, for example, the prophet writes to his people, "*Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land*" (v. 8). "*Woe to you who rise up early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine*" (v.11). "*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil*" (v20). "*And woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight*" (v.21).

Time and time again, the prophet speaks for God as he warns the people about the dangers of focusing on temporary treasures and selfish pleasures. In fact, he alludes to that very same thing when he says here in our text, "*Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?*" In other words, the prophet is asking the people then—and you and me today, "Why would you invest your time and money in things that you don't really need? Why are you trying to find satisfaction in the things of this world?"

You know what I mean. When you think to yourself, "If I just had a little more money, then I'd be happy. Or, "once I get that next promotion, then I'll be set." "I'm really not complete unless I have that special someone at my side." Or "I'm not free until I'm out of this bad marriage." If we're honest with ourselves, we'll admit that there are a lot of things that we find ourselves wanting, yes, craving. And a lot of them aren't healthy. They're like junk food for our hearts. Whether it's the rush of an illicit sexual encounter or it's a fantasy associated with an image on a screen. Whether it's trying to find happiness—or numbness—in a bottle, when you feel like you can't feel satisfied until that person pays for what he did, if you feel like your life is defined by what you can post on Facebook, if you feel that you can't live without your phone or you can't imagine what your life would be like without the Packers, or you just can't wait for the next presidential election, because you think that your life will be so much better after your man wins—my friends, if these are the things that you are looking for to satisfy your craving for a full and meaningful life, you are going to be sadly disappointed. Just like eating junk food leaves us feeling rotten in the end, so does trying to find satisfaction in the things that our sinful nature craves, the things that in the end, just aren't healthy for our souls.

But now someone might ask, "If we're not going to find real joy and fulfillment by indulging in the cravings of our sinful nature, then where do we find those kinds of good feelings? I mean, I don't want to feel empty. I don't want to go hungry. I want to find satisfaction in my life. I want to experience fulfillment. Where does it come from?" The answer is simply

this. True fulfillment comes only through Jesus. Remember what Jesus said in John chapter 10? Jesus told his disciples, *“I have come that they (namely, all the people in the whole world) may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10)*. In other words, Jesus came to fill us up, to give us a life that is overflowing with life.

Does that mean that Jesus can provide for all of our earthly needs? Absolutely! Jesus can make sure that our cupboard is never completely bare. He will determine how long are shoes last or how many more miles will get out of our muffler. In most cases, Jesus provides for us by using natural means. He allows us to get jobs, or receive gifts of charity. But, he also has the ability to perform miracles like the one recorded in our gospel lesson today. But remember, after Jesus fed the 5000 with that one boy’s lunch, the people came to him again, looking for Jesus to fill their stomachs again. And what did Jesus say to them? *“You are looking for me not because you saw the signs I performed, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (John 6:26-27)*. In fact, Jesus takes that picture of food that never spoils, bread that lasts into eternity, and he applies it to himself. A little later in that same chapter, Jesus comes right out and says, *“I am...the bread...of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35)*.

Obviously, in that case, Jesus is not talking about physical hunger and thirst. He's not saying that if you become a Christian, you'll never crave a cheeseburger again. No, he's talking about being filled up, being satiated, spiritually. He's talking about having your greatest needs met. He's talking about knowing that your sins are forgiven and you're all right with God. That's what it means to be filled by Jesus. It's like when one you push yourself away from the Thanksgiving dinner table and your mom says, “Are you sure I can't get you anything else to eat?” and you say, “No, Mom, I'm good. I'm full.” Or in the words of the 23rd psalm, *“I lack nothing.”* With Jesus as our bread of life, our hearts, our souls, are full.

But now, as long as we're talking about Jesus as the bread of life, as long as we're talking about spiritual eating and drinking, we have to deal with one common misconception. There are a lot of people today who believe that if you want to find your satisfaction in the Bread of Life, first you have to pay for it. In the children's lesson today, Pastor Wordell made that very point. (If you haven't watched the video yet, check it out online.) Pastor shared with the children that well-known economic principle, namely, “There's no such thing as a free lunch.” In other words, if you want a McDonald's Happy Meal, someone has to pay for it. The restaurant is not just going to just give that food away for free.

Well, human reason would have us apply that same principle to spiritual eating and drinking. Human reason would have us think, “If I want to receive some spiritual nourishment from God, I'm going to need to somehow pay for it. I'm going to have to do good things for God and my fellow man if I want to receive something good from God. That's how human minds think. There's no such thing as a free lunch.

But you see, that's not how God's mind thinks. When it comes to spiritual gifts, God doesn't barter with us. He doesn't put his gifts up for sale. Instead, he just gives them away, for free. Isn't that what God tells us in the opening verse of our text for today? God extends a beautiful invitation to every poor, penniless sinner in the world. He simply says, *“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.*

Can you imagine walking into Simon's Cheese or Flanagan's Liquor and having the owner tell you, “Go ahead and help yourself to whatever you want?” “You don't have to pay for

any of it. It's all free." No, I don't think that's going to happen. But that's what God says to each one of us. He says, "My love, my forgiveness, my heaven—all are all yours as a free gift. They're free to you because Jesus has already bought and paid for all of it with his life and death on the cross. That, my friends, is the definition of GRACE: God's Riches At Christ's Expense. That's the free meal, the spiritual banquet, that God has laid out for hungry sinners like you and me.

But now, I want you to notice how God takes that banquet and connects it to his Word. You see, the spiritual food that we receive for our souls comes to us primarily not by way of our mouths, but by way of our ears. Notice how many times here in our text God uses the word "listen". God says, "*Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good.*" Really, that's a parallel statement. When we listen to God, we are eating what is good. In other words, when we read what God says in the Bible, we're nourishing our souls with healthy food. Again he says in v. 3, "*Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.*"

Come to me; listen, that you may live. My friends, isn't that what keeps us coming back here to God's house? What keeps us tuning in to hear what God has to say to us, in his word? God extends a beautiful invitation to us. "Come and listen, and live." Not live some kind of shallow, meaningless, put-in-your-time-kind-of-existence. Rather, come and live life to the full. Live life knowing that you are a fully redeemed child of God. Live life knowing that God has equipped you with a wide variety of gifts and talents to carry out your various vocations in life. Live life knowing exactly where you are going the moment you breathe your last, and live life knowing that until that day comes, your good Lord is walking with you every step of the way. My friends, that's the full and meaningful life that God is keeping you healthy enough to enjoy, by feeding your faith with a banquet of his Word and Sacrament.

Let's face it. There's a lot of junk food in our world today. Things that we're tempted to crave and indulge ourselves in. But none of those are truly satisfying. None of them are good for our souls. But here in God's word, more specifically, here in the gospel, the good news of God's love for poor, pitiful sinners like us...here in his gracious invitation to come to him and live...here in the very body and blood of Jesus Christ, given to you in, with and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion...yes, even in the washing with water in the word—in all of these Means of Grace, the gospel in word and Sacrament, God offers to you and me truly, a banquet for our souls. This is what will keep us alive, even in the midst of a global pandemic.

Which brings me to one last point. You realize, Satan would like nothing more than to have us use Covid-19 as our convenient excuse to start skipping meals. He wants us to try to survive on the junk food at this world, because he knows that in the end, that junk food will kill us. So don't let him win that war. Don't let Satan pull you away from a healthy diet of good food for your soul. Keep God's word on the menu for yourself and your family, whether you're sitting here or watching there. And if it's been awhile since you tasted God's covenant to forgiveness on your lips, then think about joining us here three weeks from today for your chance to celebrate God's holy supper. And if you are not ready to gather in a large group, then come on a Monday night or Wednesday morning. Or contact one of the pastors and will serve you the Lord's supper privately.

The bottom line is this. We have a gracious God who desperately wants to keep our faith alive and growing. He wants us to live now and forever. To that end, he's given us a banquet for our souls. Now he says, in effect, "Whoever's hungry, whoever's thirsty, come and get it." Or in the words of Isaiah 55:2, "*Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good.*" Bon Appetit! In Jesus' name. Amen.