

Bring on the bacon. Grab some Pop-Tarts. Crack open the eggs. Squeeze the juice, smear some cream cheese on that bagel of yours and pour yourself some Cocoa Puffs.

Why? It's time for breakfast - and you'd better be eating it. Sure, we all grew up hearing it was "the most important meal of the day," but most of us assumed that was just Mom's way of guilting us into grabbing a banana as we burst out the door to catch the bus. Although, that may have been true, it also turns out Mom was on to something.

According to a study from Mayo Clinic researchers, breakfast is, in fact, the most important meal of the day, at least when it comes to the health of our hearts. Throughout the course of 20 years, doctors tracked the breakfast habits and health statistics of some 2,100 individuals. The monitoring began in early adolescence and continued into adulthood. The goal of the study was simple: to determine the positive or negative overall health effects of skipping breakfast.

Respondents who grew up in homes where breakfast was skipped, or who later in life chose to rebel against a pro-breakfast upbringing by passing on the meal as adults, showed significantly higher levels of heart-wrenching health statistics. Their waistlines were larger. Their cholesterol was higher. Their insulin levels were out of whack. The bottom line? Their hearts were sick.

In fact, many doctors who have studied the report now recommend waking up and eating some kind of substantial breakfast as an essential step in avoiding serious heart trouble later in life. Hmmm... what do you know? Looks like Mom was right after all. So, pass those pancakes.

Apparently, Moms, doctors, and the Mayo Clinic aren't the only ones concerned about heart trouble. So is Jesus. In fact, in today's gospel lesson, Jesus gives his disciples - and *us* - a clear command: "Do not let your hearts be troubled!"

Now, to be clear, Jesus isn't talking about cholesterol levels or bypass surgeries. No, he's talking about a different kind of heart trouble: the kind that can also be classified as worry, fear, anxiety, or stress. The kind of heart trouble that can feel like a loss of hope, a lack of faith, a panic attack, or pangs of uncertainty. The kind of heart trouble that keeps you up at night thinking about money, biting your nails when you're worried about your child, or on the phone with a friend craving advice for a crumbling marriage.

Perhaps already today you've had palpitations of worry, or fear, about some financial issue or family problem? That's the kind of heart trouble Jesus is talking about. It's the kind we've all experienced. It's the kind of heart trouble, faith trouble, and a lack-of-peace-trouble that tends to run rampant in our lives.

Now, it doesn't take a medical professional for us to understand that heart trouble - of the physical, emotional and spiritual kind - is a major threat to our well-being as followers of Christ. Thanks to the Mayo Clinic, we know a bowl of Cheerios will help our arteries. But what about our hearts of faith, our worries, and anxieties? What about those gnawing fears and gnawed fingernails? Let's be honest: Is it even possible, as follower of Jesus in an extremely screwed-up world, to heed his command and have an untroubled heart? *Really?* Sure it is.

According to God's Word - according to Jesus himself, in fact - having an untroubled heart of faith all comes down to what you're *feeding* your heart. Just as an omelet makes a difference physically, what you're feasting on, or depriving yourself of, makes all of the difference spiritually.

Ask any doctor, and they'll tell you there are two keys to physical well-being: It all comes down to a good diet and regular exercise. Neglect either of those, and you're headed for some trouble. The same is true with your heart of faith. It must be well-*fed* and well-*run* in order to be strong and healthy. Take another look at Jesus' words. He says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe

in God; believe also in me." Jesus tells us the key to "heart health" as his followers is to trust in and feast on him. What our hearts need to stay healthy, is regular nourishment from Christ and an active life of following Jesus.

Now, at first glance, that answer may reek of Sunday school simplicity. But it's true. Far too many followers of Christ have heart trouble stemming from the fact that their lives involve no regular *consumption* of Christ, and no actual *exercise* of their faith in the Lord. As a result, they're unable to withstand the anxieties of life that come up daily. Starving for a sense of direction that comes from Jesus in his Word, or craving some lasting peace that can come only from standing on his promises, we wind up looking for nourishment in all the wrong places!

We skip spiritual meals in favor of earthly solutions. Later, we binge on earthly things, believing they'll bring us Godly-things. For example, you might religiously consume cable news, thinking the talking heads from your preferred political tribe will give you lasting wisdom in a crumbling world. You may join the neighborhood gym and begin obsessing about your physical appearance and calorie count, wrongly believing that regaining control over your body will give you control over your startled soul.

Meanwhile, our unfed hearts of faith are going through prolonged periods of disengaged laziness. Our troubled hearts of faith, that were once tested in tough conversations with unbelieving friends in college and put to use through prayer in times of stress, now sit on the couch and consume nothing but junk. No wonder we feel ill-equipped for the worries of life!

If you already know you suffer from actual heart disease, the Mayo Clinic prescribes a dizzying array of "easy" steps to help establish a healthier existence. Simply stop smoking, control your cholesterol, manage your diet, get moving for

30 minutes each day, manage your stress, practice good hygiene, maintain a healthy weight, take your vitamins and be sure to get a flu shot. That's all.

But when it comes to having a heart of faith, it's once again about just two things. Our troubled hearts need to be fed with Christ and exercised in a life of following him. Remember Christ's own words immediately following the command that our hearts be trouble-free. Five times - *five times in just two verses* - Jesus uses the words *I* or *me*. It's nothing less than a plea for us to anchor our hearts in the hope that he gives, and the work he'll one day return to complete.

So how do we feed our hearts with the power of Christ? It comes down to being connected to the promises of his Word, found in Scripture, and the power of his presence, found in his people. Just as someone who's cultivating physical heart health by taking up running might subscribe to *Runner's World* for insight and join a local running club for accountability, God's Word and his people are essential for a strong heart of faith.

In verse 18, Christ makes a promise to his followers, saying, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." Quite often, when our hearts are troubled, and we feel furthest from Christ, it's simply because we are far from the two places where he's promised to always be found - his Word and his people.

What's more, we live in a world in which access to God's Word has never been easier. Just one example: At the Web site youversion.com, one can read the Bible in hundreds of languages and translations, take notes that can be shared with others, and use an endless number of reading plans that make connecting with Christ easier and more accessible than ever before. And once your heart of faith is fed with Christ, the essential element is to make sure it's regularly stretched, exercised, and put to the test in a lifestyle of relentlessly pursuing the Lord.

Immediately after telling his disciples to feast on him, Jesus boldly proclaimed that they would be living lives of faith in which they achieved more

amazing things than he did! "Truly, truly," said Jesus, "whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these he will do." The disciples needed hearts that were fed with Christ, because they'd be thrown into lives of doing incredible, frightening, heart-straining works in the name of Christ.

Could it be that one reason your faith feels so weak is because it never gets off the couch? Could it be that the very reason you feel so ill-equipped to *face* life's obstacles is because you've only attempted to *avoid* them? Could it be that the very means of strengthening your heart of faith is by jumping at opportunities that will *test* it?

What if, rather than avoiding that difficult conversation with your sister-in-law, you prayed for courage, sought God's people for counsel, and then approached her in an attempt to reconcile? What if, rather than living in fear of life outside the suburbs and of people who are different from you, you searched God's Word to discover Jesus' heart toward those on the fringes of society? What if, rather than worrying about your finances, you trusted Christ to be King over your treasure, set an actual budget, and attempted to tithe? What if, rather than feeding your heart with excuses to stay where you are at in life, you took bold steps to train, engage and grow your heart? What if?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, each year some 605,000 people in the US suffer their very first heart attack. Heart disease is the number-one health issue among adults, both male and female. Each year, more than 697,000 of us will die of a heart-related disease. It's the number-one killer. It's time to start feeding our hearts a little breakfast.

This morning as we celebrate 50 years of ministry in this beautiful building that God has blessed us with, let us think about how we can continue to be nourished by Jesus, and how we can continue to serve the people in our schools, neighborhoods, and communities. After all, each day, millions of disciples will feel

a few shooting pains run through their hearts as their work-stress rises, or a relationship gets rough, or money gets tight, or their health grows weak. "Let not your hearts be troubled." It's time for us to heed Christ's call, to feed on his Word and begin flexing our faith. After all, if Mom was right about breakfast, then certainly Jesus is right about this. And Thanks be to God for that! Amen.