

One day a man was standing in line at a burger joint. While he was waiting to order he turned to the person behind him and said, “If it’s true that we are what we eat, then I must be fast, cheap, and easy!” Of course, this little joke is a pretty good illustration of the well-known catch phrase “you are what you eat” and it provides us with great insight into how we treat our physical bodies! Think about it, if we only eat foods that are high in fat or high in sugar, if we only eat fast food or junk food, eventually what we are putting into our bodies will ultimately affect our health! The result of following a poor nutritional lifestyle can result in things like high cholesterol, diabetes, low energy, weight gain, heart disease; the list goes on and on!

Thankfully though we do have a choice of what we put into our bodies! Those of us who are diet-conscious know that eating right begins in the grocery store, taking a few extra minutes to check out the labels on all those cans and boxes before they go into our shopping carts. Paying attention to serving size, fat, sodium, cholesterol content, and nutritional values –and then eating accordingly – is one of the best long-term things we can do to promote our overall health.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture put together the familiar “food pyramid” a while back to educate us and to give us a visual picture of what a healthy diet looks like. At that time the base of that pyramid contained the stuff we should consume the most of, and consisted of whole grains such as bread, cereal, rice, and pasta. The USDA recommended 6-11 servings a day from that group as a staple of good nutrition. The other steps in the pyramid build on that foundation – fruits and vegetables, meats and dairy, with a very small amount of fats and oils at the top. According to the pyramid from 1992, it’s the bread group that provides a solid foundation for a good diet!

Ok so apparently, what's good for our bellies and physical bodies is also good for our spiritual lives! We need our recommended daily minimum requirement of Jesus, and in our Gospel story for today the Lord uses strong language to go along with this suggestion. He invites us to "eat" of himself! To consume him! To devour him! To feed on him!

Now if we take what Jesus is saying to us literally, we are provided with a fairly grotesque image of cannibalism. In fact, early Christians and their partaking in the ritual of communion were misunderstood by pagans and nonbelievers! But, as is almost always the case there is a deeper meaning behind Jesus words in our story!

What he is trying to teach the crowds, and us, is that just as food is put into our mouths and absorbed by our bodies, we need to receive Jesus within ourselves! Take a moment and think about what it means to consume something. If we consume a book or a novel for instance, we generally can't put it down, we spend every free moment we have devouring it, and later we may even share it with a friend. The same is true in relation to Jesus; we are called to fill ourselves up with his love and his teachings, and then share them and him with others!

Consider this! When we take the time to educate ourselves about health and nutrition, and if we put into practice what we learn, we experience several benefits such as: losing weight, having more energy throughout the day, living longer, and typically we feel healthier, better! The opposite is also true! If we don't watch what we put into our bodies, if we eat horribly then we gain weight and we feel pretty awful! Now imagine the greater benefits we receive and experience when we take time out of our busy lives to listen to and learn more about Jesus! If we truly desire to be Disciples of Christ, then we must remember that as his disciples

we are students who are called to continually learn about what it means to follow him.

In fact, as we dive deeper into our story, we begin to understand why some of the Jews in the crowd begin to complain about Jesus! Even though it had only been a day since they had witnessed him performing an incredible miracle of feeding a vast amount of people with only 5 loaves and 2 fish they begin to quarrel among themselves! Many of the people in the crowd assumed they knew all there was to know about Jesus and therefore his claim of deity “Being bread from heaven” was disturbing and outrageous to them, especially to the religious leaders. They thought they knew who he was and where he came from!!!

But, if they had taken the time to do their homework and learn more about Jesus, they would have known he was the legal son of Joseph, but not his natural son, for he was born of a virgin. They would have identified Jesus with Bethlehem in Judea instead of with Nazareth in Galilee! Perhaps they would have then been able to connect what the scriptures said about the Messiah with Jesus! If the people in the crowd would have listened deeply to what Jesus was teaching them, they would have learned who Jesus really was!

The disgruntled Jews in today’s Gospel aren’t much different from the Israelites we encounter in the story of the exodus, who complain about the manna that God provided for them during their journey in the wilderness! Like their ancestors whom God had rescued from the Egyptians, the people in the crowd seemed more concerned with their physical needs being met than with their spiritual well-being! These Jews want something that is temporary, food that will only sustain and nourish them for a short period of time! Jesus points this out to them when he reminds them that he is offering them bread of a different kind! He can supply them with a superior form of bread that will provide for their lives in an

everlasting way. Jesus declares, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Yet, like the manna their ancestors received in the wilderness, manna which means “what is it”, Jesus was a mysterious thing to the people in the crowd, just as he was a mystery to those who encountered him throughout his ministry, and even to those who followed him. As Jesus continues to explain what it is that he offers them, we begin to understand that it is not surprising that the Jews he is preaching to were unable to penetrate the spiritual meaning of his words, for understanding was possible only through faith, which we have observed they did not possess! All they appear to want is physical nourishment and earthly satisfaction.

Like Elijah in our first lesson, we often find ourselves focusing more of our time on the terrible circumstances we are experiencing, rather than putting more energy into understanding how God is helping us through them! Like the religious leaders in Jesus’ day, we often find ourselves grumbling and complaining when we think we know better. Like many of the people in the crowd, sometimes we only want to see with our eyes, or to eat with our mouths, and yet we are called to listen and to learn about Jesus! As his disciples we are called to follow him, while at the same time getting to know him! Fortunately, we are not alone in this task, and we know this because Jesus tells us in our Gospel story for today that God will draw us to him.

We come to know Jesus through scripture, the Word of God! As Lutherans we confess that it is by grace through faith that we are saved. It is through hearing God’s Word proclaimed, along with the help of the power of God’s Spirit at work within us, that we are able to believe! We are taught by God, drawn by God, dragged, pulled by him. As sinners we hear, learn, and we come as the Father draws us! Of course, there are also other ways that God can draw us to Jesus so we

can get to know him more! Perhaps he invited you to come to a worship service through a friend and you heard a sermon that helped you to understand Jesus more? Maybe God called you to attend a bible study and through your discussions with other students of scripture you began to understand more? Perhaps he worked through your parents to baptize you into the faith? Maybe you have experienced him through receiving him in bread and wine during communion?

And yet there may be a few of us who might be uncomfortable with the idea of God dragging us to Jesus, we might be worried he will drag us where we don't want to go. But, this illustration can help us understand that God is ultimately in charge of taking us down the road of life! It means that if we let him, if we follow God's will, the God who is in charge of our eternal existence, will also guide us in of our earthly lives. Have you ever heard the expression "If God is your **co-pilot**, you need to trade places?"

I must admit that I have experienced Jesus in countless different ways and have been led by him throughout my life. Whether it be to Seminary to get my Master of Divinity. Or when I was led to my first call at Holy Spirit in Las Vegas, or to Dekorra Lutheran in Wisconsin, or eventually here to First Lutheran in Mount Vernon. The Lord has always guided me to places where I have experienced struggles and challenges, and yet with God's help I have overcome them and have grown in my belief and understanding of the Lord.

So where has God pulled or dragged you in your faith Journey? What have you learned about Jesus throughout your life and how have you experienced him? Maybe he has pulled you into a council position or onto a committee where you have learned and grown in your faith? Perhaps he has drawn you to help with our quilting ministry, or to be a part of our amazing altar guild. Maybe he has led you

to participate in our church choir or to help out as a worship assistant, an usher, greeter, or reader?

When Jesus proclaims, “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me,” I get several different images of God in my head. I picture him as a truck, a tractor, a Fisherman, or shepherd and we are his trailers, plows, fish, and sheep! God pulls us to Jesus by the power of his Spirit and by his Word! When we encounter Jesus, God in human form, we are then able to understand the love that God has for us and share that same unconditional love with others! It is then that we learn to be servants, to follow God’s will, to use our gifts continually each day.

I’m sure we can all agree that there are times in our lives when we fast in our relationship with Jesus. There are times when we don’t spend enough time with him.. If and when this happens, perhaps we need to be reminded of what happens to us when we eat horribly all the time or we don’t eat for a few days? We feel bad, we have no energy, and we can’t really do much of anything. The same thing happens to our spiritual lives when we take a break from Jesus! We feel hopeless, lost, and empty.

If the Department of Agriculture suggests that we get our daily requirements of whole grains, meats, dairy, fruits, and vegetables, then I propose that we should also get our daily serving of Jesus. Each day we should ask ourselves, have we consumed enough Jesus today? As disciples we are called by God, drawn by God, into a relationship with Jesus. And when we begin to truly know Jesus, we begin to live our lives fully, and it is then that we will find a satisfaction that is everlasting! Thanks be to God. Amen.