



Sermons

from Northwood United Church

“You Are What You Eat”

2 Samuel , Ephesians 4: -5:2, John 6:35, 41-51

Will Sparks August 12, 2012

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

So how do you like that smell. Nothing quite like it eh? This is the smell of my childhood, coming home from school and there on the counter were loaves of fresh bread that steamed when you cut them open, crusty on the outside and soft and squishable on the inside. There really is no smell quite like it. Well we had to make a bit of an adjustment to make in our household in the diet department this spring which has meant giving up this kind of smell and taste. Treena was diagnosed Celiac and a month later, so were the kids. So we are a gluten free household. Which is why I had to inflict that smell on you folks instead of at home where it is kind of cruel. It may even be a little cruel here too if any of you are unable to eat gluten. Which means that when I read the gospel reading for today with Jesus saying, “I am the bread of life” I kind of began to salivate. I haven’t resorted to doughnuts under the bed or anything yet but we are taking it a day at a time.

Jesus fed the 5000, likely with loaves containing gluten, however, the bread of life, though a rich metaphor, is likely gluten free I’d like to focus for a bit this morning on what it might mean to choose for ourselves a steady diet of “the bread of life.”

But first there is a context to set, and so we turn to the story of David and his rebel son Absalom. Anybody here ever have a stormy relationship with a child or a parent? Does that ever happen? In 2 Samuel we get a wild and stormy epic of David and his family, and it is not a pretty picture. David struggles to be a strong leader for the people, but has feet of clay, as we talked about last week, and finds himself acting from a place of passion. Though passion in a leader is a good thing and it is one reason the people so love him so dearly, but his passion also gets him into trouble, but. He is more than a monarch- he is a human being. In today’s chapter we hear of the death of David’s son, Absalom, who tried to overthrow his father. You’d think that would harden David’s heart to his son, but it doesn’t, and David is heartbroken. And this is the thing with the Hebrew Bible. The story of faith and our relationship with God is rooted not in some ideal world of purity and light, but in the real world of divided hearts, and imperfect lives, where powerful attempts at be faithful are made by human beings with feet of clay. Jesus came not into some perfect world, but into the beautiful, broken real world that the Hebrew Bible so richly explores- our multi-coloured, troublesome world in which pure black and pure white, pure good and pure evil is impossible to find,.

Some years ago I took a ministry exchange to Ireland (something I would consider doing again some day by the way) I served two Methodist churches in the south, Carlow and Kilkenny and, though I knew something about “the troubles” before I went I learned so much from immersing myself in the life of churches and their people. There was a time when I thought the “The troubles” in Ireland referred to the historic conflict between protestant and catholic (largely north and south, which irrupted in the late ‘60s into something bordering on civil war. I was so wrong. Oh it is true that there is an underlying divide between Protestant and Catholic. But there are so many other dimensions that involve the history of British colonialism and its ongoing effects on the economy, who owns the land, even today, whose foreign policy rules the day if North and South work together, and then the layer upon layer of brokenness that comes with 40-

45 years of internal conflict. The landscape upon which our life and faith is played out is that of a messy broken world with beautiful, mixed up, glorious, messy families filled with imperfect people. That's the world to which Jesus came, and said, "I am the bread of life." Feed upon me, and you will have life.

I chuckled when I read Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. He says to them, "Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you." And, Oh ya, while you're at it, stop stealing lying and cheating. Just what happened in the church in Ephesus that led to him having to say all that? What happened was humanity, brokenness, poverty, oppression, the real stuff of human life, to which Jesus comes and says, "I am the bread of life." Feed on me and you will have life.

And so every day we are faced with the question, in our big global decisions and in our own personal lives, what will we choose to feed on? What will be the spiritual stuff that will give energy and power to our lives? And it is a decisive question, because we are what we eat. A life fed by a steady diet of Harlequin Romances will unfold with a different energy than one nourished by the works of Margaret Atwood. The bread of Fox news nourishes differently than the bread of CBC. I'll let you figure out which I believe is the Wonder bread and which is whole grain. What we focus on, what we choose to attend to, what we feed upon creates our lives.

I have told you before about Michael Lapsley, an Anglican Priest from South Africa, who, I believe, Louise Rolston met when she was there some months ago. I first met Michael in 1990 when he was travelling Canada stirring up support for an end to Apartheid. Because of his work to end Apartheid, Michael was the recipient of a letter bomb which took both his hands, one eye and nearly his life. But he survived- not only survived but somehow never allowed his losses to embitter him. And in an interview this irrepressible Christian man said, "I realized that, if I was full of hatred, self-pity, and a desire for revenge- that I'd be a victim forever. They would have failed to kill the body, but would have killed the soul. Those who experience horrible acts of violence are faced with two journeys. They can either pass from being a victim to a survivor to a victor, or they can be caught in a cycle of being a victim and turn and victimize others."

That's what I'm talking about. Mike refused to feast on the toxic bread of hatred, self-pity and a desire for revenge, but instead, chose the bread of life, of healing, of peace and reconciliation. And you are what you eat- you become what you feast upon. Enough people in South Africa have chosen to feast upon the bread of reconciliation that today there is hope. The same is true in Ireland. Though we cannot choose the circumstances of our life, the circumstances into which we were born, we can choose what to feast upon.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." Come to me for spiritual nourishment and you will have life. Nourish your life in the way that I nourish mine and you will discover that there is a way through to life. So what is this nourishing bread, this nourishing way, and how do we get it?

Well, we get it every day, if we choose it. When we wake up in the morning, no matter who we are and what our life circumstances, we, like Michael Lapsley are faced with two potential journeys. We can choose a journey that is nourished by the inevitable pain and conflict of living. Nobody escapes that stuff. Nobody's family is perfect; nobody lives without mistakes. We can choose a journey nourished by the bitterness of conflicts from previous generations. We can choose a journey nourished by something that rankled us from yesterday, and we can drag that into today and it will be powerful in shaping our lives for another day.

Or, when we wake up in the morning, we can choose another journey, nourished by gratitude for life, nourished by open heartedness, nourished by trust in the author of life, that even if yesterday was a mess, today may not be, nourished by the belief in the sacredness of all life, nourished by a grace and a peace that we don't really understand.

In the immortal words of Robert Frost “Two roads diverged in the wood and I- I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference.”