

In the name of the God who gives the gift of the Bread of Life, Amen.

A French epicurean and writer from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century is quoted as having said, “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are<sup>1</sup>.” This saying came from the writer’s work in gastronomy – the study of the relationship between food and culture. And the same theory holds in the study of other species.

If you ever watched Steve Irwin, *The Crocodile Hunter*, on the Discovery Channel, quite often, he would find dried droppings from some reptile. He would examine them and comment on the contents – bone, hair, etc. – and then suggest what the general size and condition of the reptile might be. Naturally enough, when he caught the snake or lizard, he would be right about its size and health. That is another example of, “Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are.” But over the years and through translation, the English version of this saying morphed into one we are more familiar with. *You are what you eat.*

But I like the original better. Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are. In essence, that is what Jesus was talking about in today’s Gospel reading. Jesus tells the crowd,

I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down

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<sup>1</sup> **Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin** (1 April 1755, Belley, France – 2 February 1826, Paris)

from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh<sup>2</sup>.

Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are.

I understand that last week Tracie preached a whale of a sermon on signs. And it bears repeating that in this section of John's Gospel, Jesus talks about signs almost non-stop. You see, John uses the term, "signs," instead of the word, "miracles." In the sixth chapter of John, Jesus is angry – or at least, disgusted – with the people – because He fed them all from a few loaves and fish and, instead of understanding the significance of the *miracle* He had performed, they just wanted him to make more bread appear.

Jesus said, in essence, "Standing before you is the bread of *life*, the thing you cannot live without." And the people said, "Great. Where do I pick up my supply? My stomach is growling. Give me the bread."

It is easy for us to read this section of the Gospel and think, "Gee those people were dumb. The Son of God – co-creator of the world – was standing right there and all they thought about was filling their stomachs." But, my brothers and sisters, I would submit to you that absolutely nothing has changed over the centuries. Just like the people questioning Jesus on that day, we still don't truly get the significance of His invitation to us to feast on the Living Bread.

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<sup>2</sup> **John 6:48-51** (NRSV)

With all due respect to our literalist brethren, Jesus was not talking about eating at all. If we were supposed to take what Jesus said here literally, once we have partaken of the Eucharist; shared the bread and wine that have been transformed into the Body and Blood; we should *never* have to have another meal. We would never be physically hungry again. But that's not it. What He meant was that we all need to *feed on* Jesus – *ingest* Him – *make Him a part of us* – so that we can experience the fullness of life that He had, and Has.

Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are.

A real, deep belief in the truth of the “Bread of Life,” sayings results in a transformation – not of our bodies – but of our lives. If we truly feed on Jesus and He becomes an actual part of who we are, then what happens in our lives is transformational. In the eighth chapter of John, Jesus tells those who believed in Him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.<sup>3</sup>” He told them that the bonds of slavery to sin and unbelief would be broken forever and the people would be free to live a full life, if only they ate of the bread of life.

I read a story recently that was told by the Rev. Dr. Will Willemon, Dean of the Duke Divinity School. Dr. Willemon tells about a mission trip he took.

In Haiti, ... we spent a couple of weeks working among some desperately poor people in the poorest of countries in our hemisphere. One afternoon we piled into a little truck with two great pots of rice

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<sup>3</sup> **John 8:31-32** (NRSV)

and went out to a desert-like place to desperately poor people who lived in a tiny group of grass huts beside a dry riverbed. There we were to offer these people food.

Upon our approach, dozens of people ran toward our truck. Many of them were naked. All of them were starving. They frantically pushed in among us, thrusting their little eating bowls toward us. In a hectic five minutes they emptied over two hundred pounds of cooked rice. Then they fell silent and moved back to their huts and we drove away.

I'll never get that sight out of my mind. (Dr. Willemon says). To stare starvation in the face, to see what bread means to starving persons, is to know the radical quality of Jesus' statement, "I am bread."

There are times when we are physically hungry, but we don't know what it is that we want to eat. We search through the refrigerator and the pantry, looking for something to eat that is not there. That's also the way it is in our lives. But Jesus said He would feed our hunger – even if it is unnamed, not fully articulated. He said that He would fill that empty space, that gnawing, growling hole within us.

There is an emptiness in each of us that can only be filled by the Bread of Life. No matter how much money you make, it will not feed that hunger. I don't care how many possessions you have – how much "stuff" you own – how many toys are at your house – none of it will feed that hunger. No matter how many hours you devote to golf, or fishing, or gardening, or watching TV, or playing video games, that empty place will not be filled. You can raise the best kids in the world (because of your deep devotion and gift of time and attention to them) and still there will be hunger. You cannot drink it away – I know, I've tried. You

cannot smoke it away. There is no pill that will satisfy your hunger, or fill that emptiness.

What do *you* eat that does not give life? What things do you “*eat*” or take into yourself; make a part of yourself; that do not bring life? It is time to take stock. Are you a workaholic; an alcoholic; a shopaholic – or any of the other “holics,” that society now recognizes as illnesses.

Jesus has called all of us to a life of discipleship – a life of following Jesus and living the full life of one who has eaten the Bread of Life. We cannot begin to be completely filled by that Bread that gives life until we make room for it by getting rid of the things that have failed to satisfy our hunger.

Begin today to examine your life. What are the things you do – what things do you chase after – that you hope will fill your life; feed your hunger – but which never do? Get rid of them. Make a place for the Living Bread to enter in and completely satisfy the hungers of life.

You only have to make a small place – the size of a communion wafer and a sip of wine. That is all the room Jesus needs to enter in. But what you do when you walk away from here, what you do when the hunger of money, possessions and power comes back; well that’s up to you. The Living Bread is still there, waiting to expand to fill the void. But you have to allow it to happen. You have to *want* that food that satisfies for life.

Invite the living God to take priority in your life, to be the food that sustains you, and it will happen. Become a disciple – a follower – of the Bread of Life.

And remember:

Show me what you eat and I will tell you what you are. Amen.