

Real Food

John 4:27-38

I think all of you know what junk food is. Potato chips and pretzels, candy and soda. And then, of course, the fast food cheeseburgers and french fries and onion rings. I guess pizza would qualify as well. Should I add doughnuts and ice cream? You know, all the things so many of us really enjoy eating! Ok, lots of calories and little or no nutritional value. That's junk food.

I want you to keep that image this morning as we study the topic of real food! Not because I'm going to make any suggestions about what food you ought to eat, but because the illustration is very helpful in understanding the lessons that Jesus would want to teach us from our text. Particularly the emphasis upon "real food" that Jesus identifies in,

v.34 "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."

Real food. Finishing the work that his father had given him to do! That's our subject.

But the disciples didn't get it. Jesus had engaged himself with this woman at the well in Samaria, and he has offered her living water. In other words, salvation. And she seems quite interested. Indeed, she goes into the nearby city and actually begins to tell people about Jesus, inviting them to talk to Jesus themselves!

v.29 "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

We are even told that she was successful!

v.39 "And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I ever did."

The disciples just didn't understand! The word I have chosen for them today is dullness. The dullness of the disciples, and it is a dullness that could easily affect every one of us as well. So my agenda here is not to present a sermon that identifies all the weaknesses of the disciples, but rather that their dullness, which Jesus points out, would be an example for our encouragement and warning. For our benefit. So that and I would not end up having similar dullness. First,

I. THE DULLNESS OF THE DISCIPLES TO UNDERSTAND JESUS' MISSION ON A PERSONAL LEVEL.

Emphasis on personal. They were constrained by their own man-made traditions. They were constrained by their culture. And Jesus just shouldn't been talking to that woman!

They could only see that their master was talking with this lowly woman. They were bound by the horrible, man-made regulations that judged this encounter to be scandalous, even immoral. For the written sayings of the Rabbi's included this one: "A man shall not be alone with a woman in an inn, not even with his sister or his daughter, on account of what men may think. A man shall not talk with a woman in the street, not even with his own wife, and especially not with another woman, on account of what men may say."

Notice that emphasis. "On account of what men may say." They were men-pleasers, not seeking the approval of God but the approval of man. They were bound not by the traditions of God, but their own. They were not properly constrained by the desire to please God, but by their inordinate desire to please men. And because of those traditions, they were kept from proclaiming the gospel to this Samaritan woman.

Their reaction is all wrong! They marveled that he talked with a woman. They were amazed. Astonished. Scandalized! Perhaps even offended. And no one even inquired about the nature of the conversation! No one even bothered to ask what they were talking about. Not one of the disciples had proper priorities, priorities focused upon the kingdom of Christ, and not one of them even thought to find out if Jesus had told this woman the good news of the gospel. None of them even considered that possibility, that their master had actually offer this woman “a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

v.27

A. The disciples demonstrate the need for personal interest in the lost.

They didn't have it! They looked upon her as a woman, to be ignored; and a Samaritan woman, to be hated. They didn't look upon her as one who was in desperate need of eternal life! There was no personal interest.

We can fall into that same danger, can't we? It's easy to view people as a bother. It's easy to withdraw from engaging with people because they are different from you, they look different, or talk different. Even without the full-blown racism that our country is to figure out how to identify and address, even without such racism, its easy to be drawn to people who are similar. It's easy to comfortable with people who are like you, and uncomfortable with those who are not.

May we always be on guard against such dangers! In other words, express a personal interest.

But the disciples were just plain dull.

v.27

The woman is different, though.

B. The woman reveals a personal interest in Jesus.

Actually, a significant personal interest. We're not told absolutely whether or not she became a believer, but it certainly seems like she did. She was at least interested enough to invite others to join her in talking to Jesus. She became a rather effective evangelist, didn't she?

v.28-30

v.39

Her words had great effect, no doubt revealing the intensity and fervency of her testimony. This woman, who was so hated by the Jews, went and told her fellow Samaritans that some prophet had told her everything about her life. And she had enough credibility that the people of Samaria went to find out for themselves!

So, what about you? Do you have a personal interest in Jesus? And a personal interest in telling others about Jesus? Those two things really do go together! Yet we can easily become constrained by our own social circles. We can easily become dull within the familiar traditions and customs of our own life experiences.

And it is far too easy to lose that personal interest in the dull routines of religious activity, just going through the motions. Just perform your religious duties as ritual, a dry and routine exercise of religious activity, as if that can substitute for a living, vital and personal engagement with Jesus.

You read your Bible. You have your prayer list. You come to church. Maybe even Sunday School. And all of those are good things. But not without a personal interest in Jesus! And without

that personal interest yourself, you are not very likely to look upon the lost with a personal interest in their salvation the way that Jesus did.

Jesus offered this woman life! He talked to her. And all the disciples could worry about was dinner!

v.31

Again, dullness.

II. THE DULLNESS OF THE DISCIPLES TO UNDERSTAND THE HIGHER PRIORITIES OF JESUS' MISSION.

Higher priorities. In other words, real food. Not the junk food the disciples were attracted to. Not the food that only had reference to physical life here on earth. But real food.

v.32

The disciples were stuck in their dullness pretty deeply!

v.33

And Jesus begins to teach them what he means.

v.34

So what is the dullness of the disciples, the junk food which we need to identify and avoid as well?

A. The disciples were overly concerned with physical needs.

They were only concerned with outward things. That was their priority. What time is dinner?

Now, worldly sustenance isn't such a bad thing. Jesus, in his humanity, needed to eat. It was just as much a physical necessity for him to eat as it was for his disciples. He was fully man. His human nature was real. And the disciples were, no doubt, well-

intentioned in seeking to care for his physical needs. So they urged him to eat.

The problem was, they were over-concerned with worldly sustenance. They were more concerned with worldly sustenance than eternal life! They were more concerned to see that that Jesus got enough to eat to fill his belly than they were to see that this woman got words of life to satisfy her soul.

And their blindness and hardness is obvious. Read again, v.32-33

They just couldn't get past the obvious, external, physical meaning of the words.

But Jesus would. He would teach them what Moses taught the people of Israel,

Deut. 8:3 "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."

Jesus himself had learned that lesson so well, quoting that very verse to Satan at the point of his great temptation. He learned that lesson as he learned obedience by willfully choosing to resist the temptation which Satan placed before him.

Mt 4:4 "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

That's what the disciples missed at this point. That's what kept them from ministering the gospel to this Samaritan woman. They were concerned about the bread, the bread which sustained life in their bellies. Not the real bread of life. The real food, which

Jesus would describe.

Many people today are, as well, over concerned about worldly sustenance. We live in a rich and prosperous nation, and yet we want more, don't we? We want our children to have more, don't we? So we work harder, and longer. We obtain more money and more possessions. And we are never satisfied. We always want more. And the measure of how much we need is determined by the standard of what others have. We want to keep up with the Joneses. And we end up serving what the Apostle Paul calls the "god of the belly." We become those whose God is their stomach.

Phil.3:18 "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things."

Their God is their belly. Their object of worship is that which feeds their physical needs and physical desires. But what about us? What does Paul say in that passage about believers?

Phil.3:20 "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."

So don't let your stomach become your god. That is, don't serve the physical needs of your flesh. Don't let them become your highest priority. And understand what Jesus means when he says, "Man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."

In terms of eternity, physical nourishment is comparable to junk food. No nutrition for your soul. So Jesus identifies real food. Food that he says his disciples don't know about, in verse 32. Real food.

v.34

B. Jesus' priority is to satisfy the will of his father.

This is where your religion, your faith, is so much more than merely a description of what you do. Or even a list of doctrines you believe. This is where it really gets deep, deep into your soul. The question could be put, "What is your food?"

Or, what is your priority? What is most important? What is your purpose in life? What is your vision, we might say today? What is your passion? All of those questions get at this image that Jesus uses of "my food." "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."

So...is that YOUR food? Is that what drives you? Is that your priority? Is that the most important thing? To do what God would have you to do. To do what God would want you to do.

Remember what that meant for Jesus. It meant suffering. It meant giving up his life. And we can rightly say that Jesus learned to do just that! It wasn't automatic, because he was fully and completely human. He learned obedience. He learned to do his father's will, by doing it!

Heb. 5:8 "...though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."

Do you remember when Jesus learned obedience to his father's will most perfectly and most fully? In his perfect sinlessness, he learned obedience through his suffering in the

Garden of Gethsemane.

Matthew 26:39 “He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’”

His priority was kingdom work! And for him, that meant doing something that no one else could do. Dying on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

And accomplishing that work, finishing that work, was his real food. Doing what God his father sent him to do, that was his real food. Obeying his father, that was his real food.

Can you say that about yourself? Will you say that about yourself? Ultimately, you must! You must be willing to say, “My first priority in life, that which is of most importance, is doing the will of God my father.”

And not because you fear his wrath and condemnation, not out of mere duty nor begrudging reluctance, but because you love him as your father. “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.”

The disciples showed their dullness in a third way as well, a point Jesus makes pretty clearly.

III. THE DULLNESS OF THE DISCIPLES TO UNDERSTAND THE URGENCY OF JESUS’ MISSION.

Do you see how all these apply so directly to us today also? Nothing has changed. And it is very easy to lose your sense of urgency with relation to the things of the Lord. Just look at the disciples.

A. The disciples were inactive and passive.

v.35

They were today’s couch potatoes. Watching TV and eating that junk food. After all, it was four months until the harvest. No need to work hard at the moment. Time to take it easy. And Jesus makes application to the mission of the gospel. And the harvest then means seeing non-Christians become believers! Building the kingdom by bringing people in!

v.35b “Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!”

We can be inactive and passive, too, can’t we? Inactive and passive because of our theology, that God is sovereign so we think that means we don’t have to do anything! Inactive and passive because we think that the church does the work of the gospel, not any of us personally. Inactive and passive because we’re lazy, or distracted. Or too focused upon the things of this world. And maybe were inactive and passive because we just don’t expect God to do much. We don’t really expect to see anyone saved.

So this reminder from Jesus is very helpful. Jesus urges us to see the harvest of those who obtain eternal life.

v.35b “Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!”

Start looking around you with that perspective this week. Start looking at people in this context, that the harvest is white for harvest. Start looking at unbelievers as if you really believe that God saves sinners. And friends, really believe it!

Pray for it, with expectation. Pray for it within the church, and among your friends. It is a repeated theme throughout the Bible.

Mat. 9:37 “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are

few. 38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

So take your place!

B. Jesus urges us to take our place in the work of the gospel.

v.36-38

There is the priority. There is the real food. We are to sow, and we are to reap. That is, for a farmer, to work. To plant the seeds and to gather the harvest.

One of the things we need most as a church is this priority. Beginning right here in Mt. Airy. There is reference, of course, to world missions, and next week we will have the privilege of a missionary visit by Woody and Laurie Laurer, who have spent their entire adult lives living out this priority and perspective that even in Japan, the fields “are already white for harvest!”

It includes the unbelievers we pray for as a congregation. It includes the witness that you have with people you work with, or go to school with, or live near. Beloved, in Mt. Airy, the fields “are already white for harvest!”

And that perspective is what must determine our priorities as a church! Priorities not upon the common things associated only with this world, like food. But the priority that recognizes the urgency of the work of Jesus’ kingdom.

Pray that this church will have that proper priority, that our food, that which keeps us going and the very reason for our existence, will be to finish the work that God has given to us, to make disciples of Jesus Christ, teaching them to trust and to obey.

Pray that God would use us, in a mighty way, to build his kingdom here in this small corner of the world.

John 4:35 “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!”