

Deuteronomy 8:1-10 – November 21, 2018 (Thanksgiving Eve)

There have been a lot of fads in recent years concerning our food. And they're not really diet fads, in the typical sense, because they're not really structured around any particular nutritional factor. They're more about our food lifestyles.

For example, there's the vegan lifestyle. Vegans are generally vegetarians to the strictest degree. And their goal isn't about controlling any particular nutritional element. It's more about a general belief that eating animals and animal products is unhealthy and immoral.

The same goes for the organic lifestyle. Going organic is all about eating food that hasn't been subjected to any chemicals. No pesticides. No hormones. No genetic modification. You can eat just about any food you want, as long as it's labelled organic.

There's another one that's popped up recently. It's called the "Know Your Farmer" movement. The idea behind it is that you should only eat food for which you can talk to the farmer who grew it. So it doesn't matter if you eat meat or if your apples were sprayed with a pesticide. So long as you can go to the farmer who grew it and ask, "What do you feed your cattle? What do you spray your apples with?"

And this has all sorts of health and economic benefits. But I actually kinda like this idea for an oddly spiritual reason. Because it gets us more in touch with God's creation and more in touch with how God provides for us through the growing and harvesting of his creation.

It's easy to forget sometimes that Thanksgiving Day started out as a harvest festival. I was reminded of this fact when I was picking out our hymns for this evening. It's all over our songs: "Raise the song of harvest home, all is safely gathered in ere the winter storms begin." "Harvest of sown fields, fruits of the orchard, hay from the mown fields, blossom and wood." "For the plowing, sowing, reaping, silent growth while we are sleeping... thanks be to God"

But this harvest aspect of Thanksgiving Day is one that I think has been lost in recent years, simply because people don't think about where their food comes from. There's an old letter-to-the-editor that's gone around the internet several times now where a rather oblivious woman writes, "For shame hunters. Buy meat from the store where no animals were harmed."

Unfortunately, that's actually how people think, in many cases. I know when I go to the grocery store or go to a restaurant, I don't really think, "You know, there was a farmer who grew the food I'm eating. Who planted a seed in the ground. Fertilized it. Watered it. Cared for it. And harvested it." No, for many of us, food just comes from the store. And that's the end of it.

And this is really a unique phenomenon in the history of the world. Oh, sure, there have always been cities, and marketplaces where people bought food that they didn't grow themselves. But to have an entire society where only a tiny minority actually grow the vast majority of the food eaten? That's something new.

And it has spiritual implications for us. Because there is no greater reminder of God's providence than the food that we eat. There's a reason why Jesus refers to it in the Lord's Prayer as "our daily bread."

What we eat is a daily, consistent, unavoidable reminder. You can run from God in lots of areas of your life. You can shut him out and dodge him and forget about him in a million different ways. But, in the end, you still have to eat. And that food comes from God.

And this is actually a good and Godly order that the Lord has established for us. We see it emphasized in our Old Testament lesson for today. Here we have the Israelites waiting at the very edge of Canaan. They have escaped from Egypt. They've received the 10 commandments. They've built the tabernacle. And they've been wandering for 40 years now, waiting for God to allow them entry into the Promised Land. And they are now a matter of days away from doing it.

And God comes to Moses to give the Israelite one last set of instructions. And while there is some new stuff here, it's mostly reviewing what he's already told them. This is Deuteronomy, which literally means "the second reading of the law."

And God tells Moses that the one thing, the one sin, the one temptation that will plague Israel the most in the coming years will be the temptation to forget who got them there. To forget that they didn't escape Egypt on their own. It was the Lord who rescued them. And they didn't cross the Red Sea on their own. It was the Lord who brought them through the water. And they didn't travel the wilderness of Sinai on their own. It was the Lord who guided them to the Promised Land.

And God could have emphasized any of the dozens of miracles that he performed as a memorial of this Exodus. But he chooses only one: The provision of manna. The bread from heaven. The daily bread that they had to trust would be there every morning, because it would go rotten every night. This is the miracle that God highlights.

Because there will be no more manna in the Promised Land. There will be no need for it. There will be good, fertile land available. That will produce crops and cattle and wine and oil and fresh water and useful metal. All that they need for this body and life will be available to them.

And that's kinda the point. The manna in the desert was a stunning miracle that dramatically showed God's provision for His people. But the goodness of the Promised Land? That too shows God's provision for His people. All of it. Every single sip of water and every single crumble of bread shows that God provides for His people. It may be less miraculous, but it is no less important or real.

And if you can remember that. If, when you have eaten and are satisfied, you can remember to praise the Lord your God for the good land that He has given you. Well, then you can remember all of the other things that God provides.

You can remember all of the commands that He has given us. The good and blessed rules that He's given us in His Law that guide us through this life. Laws that are there not to hurt or hinder us, but so that we may live and increase in the Lord. Laws that keep us in God's path and show us our sin and reveal God's will for His people.

Laws that are, indeed, the very Word of God for His people. So that we may not live on bread alone, but on every Word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. The Word that condemns. But also the Word that saves.

The Word that became flesh and dwelt among us. The Word that satisfied God's Law when we couldn't. The Word that provides for us food that will not spoil or perish. Because it provides, once again, bread from heaven. Broken for the forgiveness of all your sins. Filling us up to eternal life.

You see, if you start by giving thanks for earthly bread, then you end up giving thanks for heavenly bread. If you start by remembering the wonder of life that God created in each and every seed that gets planted in the ground. And the blessing of people who work the soil. And the wisdom provided to those who invent new and better ways to bring food to our tables.

If you sit down tomorrow and remember the God who did everything to provide the feast you see before you, well then you can't help but remember the God who did everything to provide the heavenly feast that you have awaiting you on the last day. They are truly one and the same. The Lord simply provides.

And we are simply thankful. Because there's nothing we can say that could make God do it any better or any worse. He doesn't do it for our thanks.

He does it because that's who He is. He is a generous, giving God. A God who gave us everything. Who gave His very life for our sake. And continues to give us His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins this day.

And we say thanks because that's who we are. We are His people. Who receive every good thing from his hand. Who are his people only because of what he gave to redeem us. And we await what he will give us when He comes again. And so on this day, this wonderful Day of Thanksgiving, like God's people long ago, like those first pilgrims who ate at Plymouth Rock, we praise the Lord our God for the good land He has given us. Amen.