

Isaiah 55: 1-91 Corinthians 10: 14-22
March 3, 2013
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church
Third Sunday in Lent

This teaching of Paul is a continuation of his teaching regarding newly converted pagans. Many of the meat markets in Corinth sold meat that had been used in cult sacrifice. After a cow or sheep or goat had been sacrificed it would be sold to the butcher who would then sell it to the public. To anyone by Jews this was no problem. After all, who cares where the meat comes from as long as it is fresh? Indeed for a pagan this was a way of honoring the animal.

Yet from a Jewish point of view this was forbidden. To eat meat of an animal that had been sacrificed at a pagan shrine was to participate in the sacrifice. It was to engage in practices that were specifically prohibited by the Law of Moses. Eating food offered to pagan Gods was seen as a way of communing with a false god. For Jews and for early Christians eating food that had been offered to idols was in effect to engage in the worship of those idols. Thus Paul says it is not possible to commune with God and with the demons who entice people to worship false Gods.

In this Paul's teaching evokes Jesus' statement that we cannot serve both God and money. We cannot have everything the world offers *and* the peace that the world cannot give. We cannot have our cake and it too. Bob Dylan, in his Christian phase captures this in his song, "You've Got to Serve Somebody." "It may be the devil or it may be the Lord; but you've got to serve somebody."

Now for Paul the issue is complicated by the fact that Jesus declared that what we eat is not as important as the attitude we bring to what we eat. He said that what is offensive to God,

which is ritually “unclean”, is not what enters our mouths but it is what comes out of our hearts. Later Christians understood this to mean that Jesus declared all food to be “clean”—that is ritually ok to eat. Yet what sounds like a loosening of moral standards (“hey! I can eat whatever I want!) is in fact a raising of the standard. By placing the focus on the attitude of the heart in the eating of food means that eating food is a profoundly mindful activity. Food is no longer simply a way of feeding the body. Even less is food a way to satisfy urges, a way to comfort ourselves when we feel lonely. If all food is “clean” that is, holy in God’s sight then all food is a gift of God and to eat is to give thanks to God and to be mindful of God’s presence in the very food we eat. To eat then is a profoundly spiritual activity. It is a way of receiving God!

Yet it is a long journey from eating to satisfy our biological hunger and soothing our loneliness to being aware that every bite of food is a sacred gift of God. A recent study of eating disorders shows that those who suffer literally have impaired taste buds. They cannot taste the food they eat. Were they born that way? Perhaps. Yet in our fast food culture and overscheduled lives where eating is often “on the run” how often do we taste the food we eat? Even when we sit at table together—which has become a rarity in our culture—do we really take the time to appreciate fact there is food on the table. Do we appreciate that someone as busy as we are took the time to plan the meal and put it before us? Do we take the time actually to notice the colors of the food? Do we actually feel the food enter our mouths and sense the textures? Do we taste the food and feel it as it enters our bodies? Do we say a silent “thank you” to God at that sacred moment? Just as important: do we also say thank you to the one who prepared the meal? Do we notice the people around us and become curious about

their day? If we live alone do we invite God to be our company and to share this time with us?

Do we take the time to be aware that God has led us to the place of rest and provision?

If you answered yes to any of these questions you are already a long way down the path. But if you had hard time responding positively, you are not alone. The world that Paul lived in is no different than ours. The pressure to survive, to perform, to be a success like a strong ocean current keeps us from getting to the shore of living in the presence of God. We feel such pressure to get on with the next thing or to avoid some situation that we are literally pre-occupied most of the time. That is, we are occupying in advance some future that has not yet happened. How then can we actually be where we are—in the loving presence of God?

Thus Paul tells the Corinthians to be acutely mindful that when they eat the bread and drink of the cup they share in the body and blood of Jesus. They share spiritually in the love that led Jesus to lay aside his human life so that we may have eternal life—not only in the great by and by—but right here and now.

But as Jesus teaches us, it is not the actual bread and grape juice that contains his presence. The bread and cup become for us the body and blood of Christ when our great need and desire for him meets his great desire for us in the cube of bread and the thimble cup of juice. It is our awareness of his presence and his awareness of our desire that makes for communion. Amen.