

10 Pentecost 2003
"You Are What You Eat"
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During my freshman year in college, my suitemates and I loved to come up with profound and pretentious sayings about life. One of them was **"Food is Good."** We were real philosophers. We'd say that as we were pigging out at the dining hall.

And I guess it is a rather obvious point, but food *is* good. Just think about all those fine things you love to eat. For me I think of Memphis BBQ ribs with beans and cornbread, or filet with mashed potatoes and a nice Merlot, or Jamoca Almond Fudge ice cream. I also think of all the food you all have been bringing us for the last two weeks after the birth of our daughter. It's just been day after day of delicious comfort food and great desserts. Thank you.

Food is good, but not just because it is enjoyable to eat delicious things. Our Scripture passages show that eating is about much more than just...eating.
Eating builds community and sustains life.

Eating builds community. How often do you invite someone to a meal? "Let's meet for breakfast." "Let's do lunch." "Come over for dinner." Why is it that when people get together it usually involves food? **Food is a powerful way of creating and sustaining relationships.**

Experts say families that eat together stay together. There's something about sharing a daily meal that makes families, particularly those with teenagers, much closer and happier and peaceful. Meals build community. It's communion with one another.

That's true in the Church, too. **Some of the most important things we do is eat together**, whether it's a small group bible study with a meal, a parish potluck or the celebration of Eucharist. One of the things I think is unique about St Peter's is the very fine spread that you all work so hard to lay out for us during coffee hour. It's like you all are competing to make it the best every Sunday. I think that reflects the high level of fun and commitment and cohesion we share.

Meals also form community with God. All through Scripture God meets his people over a meal. That's often when covenants are formed. Remember Abraham sharing a meal with the Lord? That's when he promised that Isaac would soon be born.

Or think of the Passover meal or the Last supper with Jesus and the disciples. These meals form a special relationship between God and his people. And they form **the basis of our relationship together as the people of God.** They form our identity and mission. But food doesn't just taste good and form community.

Eating sustains life. That's obvious, right? Eat to live. Live to eat. Here's how it works. God gives life to all things and **as we eat these delicious plants and animals he created, their life becomes ours.** They become part of us, their nutrients enter our blood stream, sustaining, fortifying, feeding every cell in our body, giving us life and health and strength.

That's how Jesus describes his relationship with us in John's Gospel this morning, and it's really quite startling. **Jesus speaks of a meal.** He describes his flesh as "bread that gives life to the world." He says, "my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink."

He offers his body to us for our sustenance and transformation and he calls his disciples to eat and drink. He says those who do "abide in me" and "have eternal life." You are what you eat. **As we eat the body and blood of Christ we are infused with his life and power.** We are infused with the very life of God. Just imagine that! "Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me."

Here we see life being passed on. First the Father gives life to the Son, and the Son lives because of the Father. Then the Son gives life to those who eat him, and they live because of him. The end result is that by eating the flesh and blood of Christ, we are infused with the very life of God, the life that the Father and Son share eternally. This is truly "eternal life". When we eat, we partake of eternal life.

Wow! All that just by eating and drinking! It is amazing, isn't it? But what does it mean? Jesus says later in the Gospel of John, "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly." **What is the "life" Jesus is talking about?**

If you have brain waves and a pulse you are alive, right? Everyone has biological life, but not everyone has the "life" that Jesus speaks of here. It's an enhancement to biological life. **It is spiritual life, moral life, life as it was meant to be lived in relationship to God,** fulfilling the purpose for which God created us.

This is life that gazes upon and enjoys the beauty of God and his world, that actually experiences - not just hears - the peace and blessing of God proclaimed at the end of the Liturgy. This is life that shares itself sacrificially with others and trusts in and receives the provision, protection and guidance of God through all of the ups and downs, the green meadows and dark valleys of life.

This life that we have from **God will bring us through even the greatest darkness of all, the darkness of death.** As Jesus said, "I will raise them up on the last day." Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we will be too. And all the ravages of tragedy and sickness and aging and disease and death will be defeated. We will be made new and we will enjoy it eternally. As we say in the Creed, "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." This bread and wine "preserve your body and soul to eternal life."

We partake of all this in the Eucharist. Pretty amazing, isn't it? **How can that little sip of wine and torn-off piece of bread do all that?** It's really quite simple. You are what you eat. As we make our offering to God of the plates and the bread and wine, God takes our offering, transforms it and offers it back to us as the Body and Blood of Christ.

We then come forward in faith to receive the bread and the wine that are the body and blood of Christ. We come shoulder-to-shoulder, side-by-side, down the center aisle together and we assume the posture of a humble and contrite spirit; on our knees, with our hands out **to gratefully receive what we do not deserve.** That's powerful stuff. It changes our lives and forms our community.

As we come forward and "feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving," his body and blood become literally part of our body and blood, entering our bloodstream and cells. **We are physically one with him and are made the body of Christ,** "as members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son, the blessed company of all faithful people" or "as living members of the body of your Son," as we say in the post communion prayer.

You are what you eat. Can you see how this union forms our identity as Christians? Christ himself is living in and through us. Can you see how this shapes our community together? If we are members of the Body of Christ, we are in union with one another in a way every bit as real. Can you see how we are nourished? Our souls and bodies receive the very life of God, sustaining, strengthening and transforming us into the likeness of God.

I can just hear the invitation that rings out in our Old Testament lesson from Proverbs. "Come, eat of my bread and drink of my wine. Lay aside immaturity and live and walk in the way of insight." These are the great blessings that are ours as we come together to "feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving." This food IS GOOD. Amen.