

Pastor Gregory P. Fryer
Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
4/1/2009, The Fifth Week of Lent, Midweek
Gluttony

APOSTOLIC GREETING

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, our redeemer, in our weakness we have failed to be your messengers of forgiveness and hope in the world. Renew us by your Holy Spirit, that we may follow your commands and proclaim your reign of love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

FIRST LESSONGenesis 3:1-6, RSV

¹Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” ²And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; ³but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die. ⁵For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.

SECOND LESSON Romans 13:12-14, KJV

¹²The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. ¹³Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. ¹⁴But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

HOLY GOSPEL Matthew 4:1-4, RSV

¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. ³And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”

- 1 Praise and thanksgiving, Father, we offer
for all things living, created good:
harvest of sown fields, fruits of the orchard,
hay from the mown fields, blossom and wood.
- 2 Bless, Lord, the labor we bring to serve you,
that with our neighbor we may be fed.
Sowing or tilling, we would work with you,
harvesting, milling for daily bread.
- 3 Father, providing food for your children,
by your wise guiding teach us to share
one with another, so that, rejoicing
with us, all others may know your care.
- 4 Then will your blessing reach ev'ry people,
freely confessing your gracious hand.
Where all obey you, no one will hunger;
in your love's sway you nourish the land.

Text: Albert F. Bayly, 1901-1984, alt.

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SERMON

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

⁴But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4, KJV)

It is hard for me to imagine Jesus being a portly man. I mean, look at him, there in our reredos! He does not look portly to me. And as we see him there in that beautiful wooden statue is exactly how I picture him to be.

But I have to admit that there is no theoretical reason to picture Jesus as tall and lean, like Clint Eastwood. It depends on metabolism, to some degree. Just recently a fellow said to me that he could simply look at food and put on five pounds. On the other hand, my great predecessor here at Immanuel, Pastor Raymond Schulze, could eat all day and remain a slender guy. The Bible does not say one way or the other what Jesus looked like and so, I guess, Jesus could have been overweight, or least, big-boned, as they say.

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Still, I doubt it. Jesus was and is the Master, and I doubt that he was ever *mastered* by food or drink, as we sometimes are.

That is one of the chief lessons of the desert temptation story. Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights. Afterward, as St. Matthew puts it, he “was hungry.” I bet he was. The Greek word there - *peinao* - has an air of eagerness about it. It means to be needy, to crave ardently, to be “famished,” as the *New Revised Standard Version* puts it.

It is in this circumstance of starvation that the devil comes to Jesus to tempt him, and, naturally, he begins with food:

If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.(Matthew 4:3, RSV)

Now, there is nothing wrong with bread. The problem here is not bread, nor even the temptation to made stones into bread. After all, Jesus did something akin to that when he fed the five thousand with the five loaves and two fishes.(Matthew 14)

No, the real excitement of this first temptation is the repair of the disaster of Eden. In this desert temptation story Jesus got right what the first Adam got wrong. In the garden, Adam and Eve forsook the Word of God for the sake of the appealing food. In the wilderness, Jesus, the Second Adam, made it perfectly clear that the will of his heavenly Father meant more to him than food.

The story of the Samaritan woman at the well expresses this point beautifully:

³⁰They went out of the city and were coming to him. ³¹Meanwhile the disciples besought him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” ³²But he said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.” ³³So the disciples said to one another, “Has any one brought him food?” ³⁴Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work.(John 4:30-34, RSV)

This is the main point about gluttony: it is a sin against the First Commandment. It is a sin that Jesus refused to commit. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and mind and soul. Thou shalt love *the Lord* more than food.

As with all the vices, the vice of gluttony is the shadow side of a virtue: the virtue of joy in the good things of God’s creation and gratitude for them. That is why I chose this evening’s hymn, *Praise and Thanksgiving*. That hymn seems to express the right balance toward food and drink: joy and gratitude for our daily bread, combined with compassion for the poor and hungry.

The phrase there, “daily bread,” comes from the prayer our Lord taught us. He did not teach to pray for a feast or a banquet, nor that we should become fat, but simply that we will have enough food to make it through this day. Then, we are invited to trust in God for tomorrow’s bread. We do not need to eat as if there is no tomorrow.

The church fathers count gluttony among the “capital” sins, *i.e.*, the sins from which other sins proceed. This was a big concern for Martin Luther. He passionately preached against drunkenness and gluttony because he was so aware of the power of

over-eating's lethargy and the altered states of consciousness induced by drugs and alcohol to incline us toward sins against chastity and against justice:

For reveling and drunkenness foment unchastity, or as the Greek says, lasciviousness. Thus the holy fathers stated that he who wishes to serve God must above all fight against the vice of gluttony, because it is both the first and the most difficult vice to overcome. If this is not rooted out, even if it does not lead to chambering and lasciviousness, as sometimes happens with older men, yet it renders the mind unprepared over against divine matters. For this reason fasting is one of the strongest weapons of Christians, but gluttony is one of the most potent machines of the devil. (LW 25, on Romans 13:13)

Your body is precious and should be cherished, including cherished by you, yourself. There are many valuable things in this universe, but your body is among the most precious of them all. Our Maker has entrusted your body to you, for you to enjoy and to use as an instrument for helping others.

¹⁹Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.(1 Corinthians 6:19-20, RSV)

Therefore, do not weigh your body down by extravagance of food or drink -- neither by over-abundance, nor by deprivation through dieting, vanity, or overly severe piety.

And so, even in so simple a matter as food and drink, we should strive for self-mastery, almsgiving, and the presentation of ourselves as "living sacrifices":

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.(Romans 12:1, NRSV)

Let it be with us, then, that we mean to love food and drink less, and to love Christ more, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.