

Multiplying Good Food for Thought, Bodies and Souls based on Mark 6: 30-44, David Jahnke, 5/24/15

One thing which pervades this text is weariness. The crowds are weary after a long day of walking around the lake in the hopes of seeing Jesus again and after a long afternoon without food.

Jesus too was ready for time away. Right before our passage, we learn that King Herod had killed Jesus' cousin John the Baptist. And Herod thought that Jesus was the resurrected John the Baptist. The implication is that Herod and his followers will come after Jesus. So Jesus wanted to get away for a while and tells the disciples to get in the boat with him.

The disciples were tired as well, having just returned from going to village to village and preaching the good news and exorcising demons. And they had brought nothing with them so where they were entirely dependent upon others. They must have been thrilled to hear from Jesus that it was time to get away and relax in God's beautiful world. But when they got to the other side of the lake, what did they meet? Another crowd...and one bigger than ever. And Jesus, instead of saying, "Sorry folks not today. Today is a Sabbath retreat for me and my students," Jesus looked at them had compassion for them because he saw that they were sheep without a shepherd.

And after another long afternoon of teaching the crowds, the disciples have finally had it and they ask Jesus to tell them to go home and get something to eat. And Jesus then said something that must have made the disciples think he had lost it; he said, "Why don't you get them something to eat?" You've got to be kidding Jesus. There is no food around here and it would cost a year's wages! We do not have any money because you sent us out without any!

On Tuesday night, around 12 leaders of this church gathered together and considered this passage. One pointed out some of what I just mentioned. Another spoke of how Jesus fed both people's minds and their bodies. And whether people needed to have their physical needs met before they could give serious thought to God's Word. Others raised more important points. It was a great devotional. We have a lot of really good shepherds in this church.

But as we moved into our meetings, I sensed weariness among these leaders. And my first word to all of you who show so much care and do so much teaching and helping is how pleased God is with you and that Jesus really does want you to rest. He wants you to get away with him and head off to quiet places for the sake of prayer and healing.

But the crowds are always following Jesus. And he is full of compassion and always willing to teach and feed and heal. And we are His body in the world today. I know you are tired. I know you have too much to do. I know it is just not fair or reasonable to ask you to keep feeding the masses, especially after Jesus has promised you rest. But in this growingly secular world, our work in Jesus' name is more vital than ever.

Hunger remains a huge issue in our world about which our church does a lot. But today I want to talk about another reason why people in America today are so tired.

First a story from Prairie Home Companion that I heard last night. There was a potluck at the Lutheran Church in Lake Wobegon and Pastor Engquist made sure she got a little portion of everything; and everybody was glancing over to see she was eating and what she was not. I did not know that you all do that at Potlucks. Good thing I love everything. Well Pastor Engquist got up to talk to someone or to use the restroom and when she got back, all of the food on her plate was gone. And she thought to herself that it was the opposite of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish.

The same thing happened when my wife Hailey went to the Stage House with some other church members. Dietrich and his friend kept getting up from their seats and one of the times, the waiter got to his plate which had barely been touched. I don't think Dietrich was too bummed.

We need to see this kind of reverse multiplication. We need some foods to go away and it needs to start happening exponentially. Because we now have more people dying from weight-related illnesses than starvation.

What has multiplied exponentially over the last 40 years is the amount of sugar in the American diet. And we do not even realize it. So many of us are like sheep without a shepherd. Our children are filled with fruit drinks, cereals, cheese and all kinds of processed foods from a very young age, and our bodies get used to this and crave it. These foods are everywhere, always right by the entrances and the checkout aisles of the grocery stores to make sure that we do not miss it. There is fast food in every town and especially in poorer communities.

And we see and hear over and over the misleading marketing campaigns that highlight the nutritional or social value of this junk—do you know that our official government school lunch policy considers frozen pizza to be a vegetable?—and the simple but insufficient answer we hear time and again is that we just need to have stronger wills and eat less and exercise more.

Those are important, obviously. But two other things need to multiply; that is the truth about junk food—that it is killing us and the will to do something about it. Jesus taught the truth time and again. When we learn the truth, maybe we will find the will to no longer allow fast food or sodas in our school cafeterias; 50% have fast food chains and 80% sodas and other sugar-waters due to the easy money that comes with them. Should we really be funding our education with addictive foods that are killing us? I guess we could raise revenues by selling cigarettes or vapers too. Maybe we will wake up and stop this; maybe we will not allow junk food ads to be aimed at children. Maybe we will bring back public service announcements in which all the athletic and entertainment stars promoting good foods and condemning bad ones. Do you remember public service announcements? Yul Brenner and such? Have they disappeared? We cannot educate or reform anymore because we don't want a "nanny state"?

We took a stand against the smoking industry and what a difference it has made. And we must find the will to do it again because we have a huge problem. It is a culture of death with tens of thousands of adolescents being diagnosed with what used to be called adult onset diabetes because it never occurred before age 30. Heart problems, cancer, diabetes...so many other health issues are directly connected to the foods we are eating and these problems will continue to multiply, along with all of the costs, if we do not find the will to address this. And it needs to start today and in our own homes.

I believe the shift has begun. Seth came home the other day and told me that sugar was as addictive as almost anything. And I contradicted him only to learn from the movie that there is a lot of science behind the idea. The movie, by the way, which triggered this sermon is called Fed Up, in case you are interested

The shift is happening in our home, unintentionally, in one regard. We have not had Diet Coke in our fridge for a month or so and the first two weeks, I kept asking Hailey if she had bought it...as if she is the only one who can go to the grocery store!! But these last two weeks I have not missed it at all; and I am afraid the next thing to go will have to be one of my junk food staples – cereal.

Every staff member of this church takes this stuff very seriously and I have gradually been getting on board. I hope you will as well.

Because it is time to multiply health in body, mind and spirit. It is time to bring this up at school board meetings. It is time to write our senators. It is time to help in personal ways. Because there are thousands around us looking for help. And help starts with grace and love— not judgment about irresponsibility or a lack of willpower. This goes so much deeper than free will.

And this is just one issue. How many children of God out there struggle and need friendship, instruction, encouragement, hope, guidance...love? We get tired but may we all take our tiredness to Jesus and find strength in him and in healthy living; may we have compassion upon those who struggle; and may we feed them with love and the truth. To the one who can do far more abundantly in us than all we can ask or imagine. To God be the glory, now and forevermore. Amen.

