

Food for a Healthy Spiritual Life

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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"We are what we eat." Do you believe this? There are a lot of doctors and medical people who do. I have been talking to many of them lately. Unfortunately, it is really hard to know what to eat anymore. As early as I can remember I was told how important it was to start the day off right with a hearty breakfast. My mother took this very seriously. Every morning she made sure that the Peterson kids went to school fortified for the day ahead. She would serve us bacon or sausage, sunny side eggs fried in bacon grease; sometimes mashed potatoes, again in bacon grease, and, of course, there was toast, all which was tanked down with a full glass of whole milk. It was delicious! Today we are told that this was like inhaling Virginia clay into our arteries. It is amazing how many things that we once thought were essential for health have turned out not to be good for us.

I do not know about you, but my doctors are constantly stressing to me to *"watch my diet"* if I want to extend my life. They keep telling me, *"you are what you eat."* Junk food in... junk life out. What is true for us physically is also true for us spiritually. Spiritually certain foods appeal to us, but they fall short of helping satisfy our real spiritual needs.

Jesus warned the Pharisees, who were very interested in spiritual things, ***"Do not work for the food that spoils but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."*** (John 6:27) The Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus' day had their focus on many spiritual things.

They stressed how people should dress, how they should eat, who they should associate with, and they burdened the people with one religious requirement after another. The Pharisees were passionate about religious things, but they were the wrong things. They were missing the one essential thing and that was to believe in Jesus Christ, whom God had sent to be their Savior. Spiritual life does not come from what we do...it is a gift of God. Our spiritual hunger can't be satisfied by our religious practices. We need to feast on God's love for us in Jesus Christ every day.

We live in is a very secular culture, but there are signs of a spiritual hunger all around us. People are doing all kinds of things to be healthy and to improve their lives and this is a good thing. Fitness centers have popped up like temples in every shopping center; books abound on health, fitness, and diet; and there are all kinds of videos for exercising and meditation programs. We even wear watches and Fitbits to count our steps, calories, heartbeats, etc. These are all good things, but they are not enough. If we want to experience the fullness of life we need to connect with the very author of life. We want to know Him and experience His love and seek to do His will. Jesus is the bread of life, the essential food we need for life.

Recently, I decided to seek out cancer support for myself and found a wonderful free resource thru the INOVA Healthcare System called, *"Living with Cancer."* One of the things that I learned from the counselors was a meditation process called "mindfulness." Mindfulness is the discipline of using your mind to decrease your anxiety about what you are experiencing. They teach you how to use music to calm your mind and to use directed meditation. It is very helpful. St. Paul actually affirmed this. He wrote, ***"Finally, brothers,***

whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable...if anything is excellent or praiseworthy...think about such things.” (Phil.4:8) He concludes by saying we need something more, ***“I have learned the secret of being content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or want. I can do everything through him, who gives me strength.”*** (Phil. 4:11-13)

St. Paul’s focus was not just on anything, his focus was on Jesus Christ. So in my meditations, instead of trying to focus on emptying my mind of my fears and anxieties, I began to focus my meditations on Jesus’ presence in my life. I created my own guided meditations using the Psalms which filled me with hope, particularly Psalm 23 and God’s promise, ***“I shall not want.”*** God has given us wonderful tools to build healthy lives, and it is important that we use these tools as good stewards of our bodies and our lives. But the challenge is to use these tools to focus on Jesus.

I want to encourage you to bring Jesus into your walking and yoga exercises; bring Him into your bike rides and running. Bring Jesus into all that you do and allow God the opportunity to strengthen your faith as well as your bodies. Summer is a magical time for children. You can almost see them grow before your eyes. Parents do not have to command their children to grow. It happens naturally as they eat right, get the proper rest, and are actively engaged. In a similar way, spiritual life comes naturally as we hear the Word of God, rest in God’s forgiveness and love, and we share His love with those around us.

St. Paul describes it this way: ***“For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith...and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God and not of works, lest anyone should boast.”*** (Eph. 2:8-9) Faith is not an accident. Jesus said He is the bread of life and He wants us to feast on Him. Spiritual growth is not about being good, it is about being in a relationship with Jesus Christ from which all good flows. We are not saved by our works—but faith always leads us to be actively engaged in the works God has prepared us to do. (Eph.2:10)

If we want to have an impact on our culture, we need to bring Jesus into what we are doing. I heard a great example of this last week. I was talking to someone in our congregation who described to me a recent experience she had while waiting to use an ATM. She likes to hum. So to pass the time while waiting she hummed the tune of a well-known spiritual hymn. A man was at the ATM and when he finished his transaction, he turned to her and said, *“I needed to hear that hymn today because I am going through a really difficult time. I remember singing that hymn as a child. It reminds me that Jesus is with me.”* It is amazing what can happen when we connect people with Jesus.

May God encourage you to bring Jesus with you this week into everything you do and into every conversation. Share the bread which gives eternal life.