

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST AUGUST 19, 2018
TRINITY CHURCH, HARTFORD

In these difficult times, here's a question: How is your soul?

How is that inside part of you which is you, which defines who you are, embraces the joys and sorrows, the wonder and the roughness, of your life? Which fuels your life and substance, is the springboard for contribution to and love for others? And, today's specific question is, what are you doing to nourish your soul? How are you feeding it to build it up, to enable it to be healthy, lively, engaged, thankful, caring?

I find myself asking these questions about my own soul these days more than usual. For as Thomas Paine wrote in 1776, I think we are living again in "times that try men's (persons) souls." Where truth, sacrificed for self-interest is made into a changing variable; the common wealth is subsumed to increasing the personal wealth for those who already are wealthy; disagreement is the foundation not for healthy engagement, but for angry separation; where differences are seen as opposition, and opposers are demeaned, slurred, labelled, locked out or locked up or sent away, or — on the streets — run into or shot. Hard-won progress in health care, energy transformation, preservation of public space and earthly resources, historic understandings and agreements, and the measurable if slow steps toward the ideal of equality for all people, progress toward these ideals and goals is being hacked as if we were clear-cutting a forest. I worry for our souls and, as Jon Meacham writes, I worry for the very soul of America.

How is your soul? And how are you feeding it, that precious soul, nourishing it in trying times, to be alive, vibrant, effective?

Jesus said,

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.' This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever."

Jesus is into nutrition! Here's Jesus, telling us what we should eat to have life, and health, inside us. Such life and health within us that we should live forever.

Yes, Jesus definitely is into food. He's pushing the living bread, "eat this bread," which is the gift from heaven. And it's different from the last time God gave bread from heaven, the manna which God gave the starving Israelites to sustain them in their formative journey through the desert. Everyone who ate that bread from heaven, the manna, eventually died, as Ben reminded us last week. But eat this bread, Jesus says, nutrition for the soul, and it gives life into eternity!

Think how different Jesus' teaching is from that which had gone before.

In the First Testament, what I remember most often about the word is about what not to eat, to keep from being unclean. Don't eat of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden. Don't eat the flesh of camels or rabbits or the pig or any seafood without scales, or birds of prey or insects. Don't eat the flesh of a calf boiled in its mother's milk, a merciful proscription which became the basis for strict separation of meat and dairy.

Jesus, on the other hand, said, first, it isn't what goes into a person's mouth that makes the person unclean — listen and understand, he said — it's what comes out of a person's mouth — and he was specific — evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander, envy (to name a few) — that's what defiles, destroys, plays on fear.

And, then, even more, Jesus, the nutritionist, tells us what it is that we should eat: the bread that came down from heaven — which digested and taken into the soul, brings life, and leads to life eternal.

Even as Wisdom invites us to eat her bread, to live, to walk in the way of insight, Jesus now calls us to the table, to eat the bread come down from heaven for more than insight, to have life

We are bread-eaters.

We also are word-eaters. Not our own words. But God's. We are called to devour Scripture. As Jesus said face to the face of the devil, yes, we live by bread and we also live by the word of God. Essential nutrients which, as we pray God in a favorite collect to help us, we might read, mark, learn and inwardly digest — the Word of God to inform, encourage and nourish our souls into health and life.

We are also Spirit-breathers, breathing in fresh air, the breath of God. Blessed with the Holy Spirit in Baptism, the Spirit stirred in Confirmation, the blessed breath of God within us every second, minute, hour of the day, to teach, guide, direct, empower our souls for life.

Manifold sources nutrition for our souls.

So that rather than, as with some, tearing apart the fabric which can bind us and lift us up together, or languishing as others do without hope, what comes I pray from our souls nourished in God is vision, the hope and promise of a world more just and caring, respect, charity, building up and transformed by our presence, our words and our service. The exercise of our faith.

Saint Paul spurred on the Ephesians, who like us were living in what he called evil times, and were taking Christ into their lives,

Be aware, careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Making melody — thank you to our returning choristers, the Choir School of Hartford leading us today — soulful melody — how different from cursing the darkness — giving thanks at all times. Souls nourished by taking in the gifts of God. “Out of the abundance of our hearts, let our mouths speak!”

I hope your soul is doing well in these times. We are Bread-eaters, Word-swallowers, Spirit-breathers, blessed to take in the gifts come down from heaven to nourish our souls into life.

Eat the Bread gladly. Digest the Word well. Breathe the Spirit deeply. And exercise our faith. To our soul's health. To Life! Thanks be to God!