

Mark 14:22-25

Psalm 34

July 6, 2014

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

"A Summer In the Psalms"

Taste and See

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Some of you will remember this TV commercial from 1971:

A man is sitting at a table in a diner and says, "I came to this little place, the waiter says, "Try this, you'll like it."

"What's this?"

"Try it, you'll like it."

"But what is it?"

"Try it, you'll like it."

"So I tried it . . . thought I was going to die. Took two Alka-Seltzers."

After the voiceover explains what Alka-Seltzer is good for, the man reappears and says, "Alka-Seltzer works . . . Try it, you'll like it."

What if we rewrote the commercial for our celebration of the Lord's Supper today?

"I came to this church today, the Lord says, "Taste and see."

"What's this?"

"Taste and see."

"But what is it?"

"Taste and see."

"So I tasted and saw . . . I was going to live."

"The bread of life, the cup of salvation . . . taste and see."

The rewrite might even work if we kept the original tagline, "Try it, you'll like it."

The bread of life, the cup of salvation . . . Try it, you'll like it!

That would be an interesting invitation to the Lord's Table!

Actually, that's a wonderful invitation for us to extend to others to know God's love in Jesus Christ. "Taste and see that the Lord is good ... Try it, you'll like it!"

It has been said there is a great difference between knowing **about** Jesus and **knowing** Jesus. Think about the person you love the most in the world. Think about the great difference between being with that person and relating to that person only through a photograph.

The great 19th-century British preacher, Charles Spurgeon, told the story of a little boy at a mission station who received a piece of sugar from a missionary. When the little boy went home, he told his father that he had had something so sweet.

The father asked, “Was it as sweet as such-and-such a fruit?” “Oh, sweeter than that!” “Was it as sweet as such another?” “Yes, much sweeter than that!”

When the boy could not make his father understand how sweet it was, he ran down to the mission station and said, “Oh, sir, would you give me another piece of that sweet stuff? My father wants to understand how sweet it is, and I want to make him understand it, but I can’t tell him.” So he got another piece of sugar, and back he went to his father. “Here, father, now you will understand how sweet it is.” In his sermon, Spurgeon said, “This is a very good illustration of the text I just quoted, ‘O taste and see that the Lord is good!’ Taste for yourselves, and then you shall know for yourselves.”¹

A few months ago, a friend posted a recipe on Facebook. The ingredients sounded delicious and the picture was mouth-watering. A couple of weeks later, I saw my friend and told her, “I liked the recipe you posted on Facebook.” She said, “Oh, did you make it? Was it good?” Her answer kind of surprised me and I asked her, “You’ve never made it?” She laughed and said, “No, I don’t cook a lot of the recipes I post on Facebook. I just think they sound and look good. I’m glad it tasted good!”

“Taste and see that the Lord is good.” See for yourself. Experience God’s grace and love for yourself. Open your eyes and see the goodness of God that is all around us.

We had a pastoral care professor in seminary named Dr. Bill Oglesby who used to say, “I can tell you how to get to Washington, but I can’t go there for you.” In other words, in pastoral counseling, I can give you some directions and suggest some routes for you to take through your issues and problems. I might even be able to accompany you on the journey in a sense. But, ultimately, you have to make the trip. You have to go to Washington yourself.

The same thing is true in the journey of faith. Someone can describe the sweetness of God’s love and mercy — “Oh, it’s sweeter than such-and-such a fruit!” — but that can’t compare to tasting the sweetness and goodness for yourself.

I came across an interesting blog by a man named Brent Bill called “Holy Ordinary: The Sacraments of Everyday Life.” Back in 2009, he and a woman named Beth Booram committed to an experience they called “30 Days of Taste” based on the idea of “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” For thirty days, the two of them kept journals about what they ate and tasted. They reflected on the spiritual aspects of their “30 Days of Taste.” Keep in mind that his bloodspot is called “Holy Ordinary: The Sacraments of Everyday Life.”

On days 8 & 9, his wife was out of town and he admitted to eating less than the best and most tasty food, “rummaging around the house to figure out what’s quick and easy to fix.” Listen to his description of his Monday and Tuesday evening meals: “Monday night was — in true single guy fashion — a microwaved pizza. It was filling and not horrible, but rather tasteless — in spite of my addition of ham and lots of oregano. Tuesday evening I stopped at Gray’s Cafeteria and picked up some baked tilapia, macaroni and cheese, and sugar free cherry pie. Real food cooked in real ovens by real people. Tasty indeed.”

Here are his spiritual reflections on what it means to “taste and see that the Lord is good”: “Which made me think about slowing down — spiritually that is. How often do I just grab a spiritual bit — the equivalent of a microwaved meal? A quick hit of scripture, a hurried prayer out of the Book of Common Prayer, etc. And how many times do I really take time — like the good people at Gray’s did on my behalf — to prepare the tastes that I would enjoy. Looking for the ingredients that would please my spiritual palate and then putting them together with care — and time.”

His blog for Days 8 & 9 ended with these thoughts: “I have no idea what’s on tonight’s menu at home. But I’ve decided to stop at the grocery next to the office and assemble a meal and fix it myself. And I intend to do the same with my spiritual meal, as well. To take time this evening for reading and reflection and prayer and quiet. To let God break through as I enjoy the tastes of the meal I’ve prepared for me — and He’s prepared for me.”²

The North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church has a 10-week pastoral internship program. According to the program description, “our interns are immersed in a vocational ministry experience. An assigned clergy mentor walks alongside interns, helping them to process each experience and ensuring that they have opportunities that will enable them to deeply discern their call to clergy as a vocation. The internship is intended to expose the interns to the breadth of pastoral ministry and give them hands-on experience in a variety of areas under the guidance of a clergy mentor.” Guess what our Methodist neighbors call their pastoral internship program? “Taste and See Ministry.” The words that describe this program are significant: immersed, walk alongside, process, discern, hands-on experience.³

As we come to the Lord’s Table this morning and eat the bread and drink the cup, think about how God’s people have always been fed, spiritually and physically.

When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, they complained and grumbled against Moses and God. They said, “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” (Exodus 16:3)

The Lord told Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you.” In the morning, when the people saw “a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground” they said to one another, “What is it?” Wouldn’t that be a great place for the scripture text to have God say, “Try it, you’ll like it!” The Bible story says the people of God called it manna (“What is it?”) and that “It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.”

Before Moses died, he reminded the people of God’s grace and mercy in providing manna through the years: “He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” (Deuteronomy 8:3)

The psalmist writes, “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Psalm 119:103) 1 Peter 2:2-3 says, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation — if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”

“So how do I taste God?” That’s the question Malo Bel asks in her “spiritual thoughts baked fresh.” She writes about our “honey-flavored God” and asks “So how do I taste God? It comes down to the difference between a God stuck only in the Bible or a God also experienced in relationship. How do we fully taste God? We have to put the recipe book down and step into the restaurant of life. We taste him when we allow him to work in our life. We taste him when we step outside the boat and feel the wind and sea spray whipping our face but experience his peace. We taste him when we open our hand to give and then see how much more God has already given us.” She reflects on the meaning of what we are doing in worship today, coming to the Lord’s Table to eat the bread and drink the cup: “Have you ever wondered why Jesus chose to have us remember him through a meal? He could have chosen a special song or an action we perform. Yet he chose a meal, because it invokes taste. We taste him. We feel him enter us. We experience him. He wants us to realize that a relationship with him is all encompassing — it will consume all of us, if only we will open to the experience.”⁴

Matthew Henry, the Welsh Presbyterian minister known for writing the six-volume, verse-by-verse commentary on the entire Bible, wrote, “Let God’s goodness be rolled under the tongue as a sweet morsel.” Friends, hear God’s invitation this morning, as you come to our Lord’s table: “Taste and see that God is good!”

One of the things I like the most about the new Presbyterian hymnal, *Glory to God*, is the variety of communion hymns. I hope we will learn and sing many of them in the years to come. One of the communion hymns is called “All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly.” Consider the words as part of your invitation to our Lord’s Table this morning and to a deeper, richer, tastier experience of faith in Jesus Christ.

*All who hunger, gather gladly; holy manna is our bread.
Come from wilderness and wandering. Here, in truth, we will be fed.
You that yearn for days of fullness, all around us is our food.
Taste and see the grace eternal. Taste and see that God is good.*

*All who hunger, never strangers, seeker, be a welcome guest.
Come from restlessness and roaming. Here, in joy, we keep the feast.
We that once were lost and scattered in communion’s love have stood.
Taste and see the grace eternal. Taste and see that God is good.*

*All who hunger, sing together; Jesus Christ is living bread.
Come from loneliness and longing. Here, in peace, we have been led.
Blest are those who from this table live their days in gratitude.
Taste and see the grace eternal. Taste and see that God is good.⁵*

Let us pray: Gracious and loving God, as we come to the table today, bless us with the desire to taste and see how good you are. May we experience your goodness as we take refuge in you; through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

NOTES

¹Found at www.lantanagrace.org/articles/taste.html

²Brent Bill, “Holy Ordinary: The Sacraments of Everyday Life: Taste and See,” at www.holyordinary.blogspot.com.

³www.thecallnc.org/taste-and-see-pastoral-internship

⁴Malo Bell, “Honey-flavored God” at www.malobel.com.

⁵Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal, Hymn #509, “All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly.”