

KEY BIBLICAL PASSAGES

Exodus 15:26-16:36; Mark 6:32-44; 2 Corinthians 8:10-15

**OVERVIEW, SUMMARY, AND GOAL
(of specific sermon)**

God provides an abundance of food for all creation, yet today we often live unaware of the ways this food arrives on our plates. As stewards of God's creation, we are called to care for and sustain the gifts of God in Creation: food is central to this gift. We will explore the central 'food' story of the Hebrew Bible, the Feeding of Israel in the Desert, as a model for how God's people are to be called into a specific relationship with their food. While this 'miracle manna' story is often assumed to be primarily about trust in God, we will see how this trust in God's provision is always coupled with a set of specific actions which sustain and steward this amazing gift. We then see how this central story of the Hebrew Bible is taken up into the New Testament in Jesus' feedings and in Paul's collection, highlighting that the way in which we relate to food today is a central issue of faith and discipleship, and necessary to the care of creation.

KEY PREACHING POINTS

I. Competing Images of Food Today

- a.** Food as Fuel: 'grab an energy bar', 'power up', food on the go
- b.** Food as Sin: Calorie Counting, diet fads, diet-related diseases, obesity
- c.** Food as Feeling and as Comfort: Overeating, 'Supersize Me', sugar/salt/fat
- d.** Food as 'Personal Choice': Burger King "have it your way", Sprite "obey your thirst" – too many options? Or too few?
- e.** Food as Weapon: 1 billion overweight people, 1 billion malnourished
- f.** Food as Gift of God: Psalm 104 "all creatures look to you for their food in due season"
- g.** Food as Temptation: Garden of Eden
- h.** Food as Eucharist: 'Thanksgiving' and identification with Jesus' body

II. Among competing images, how does God call us to relate to food?

- a.** Israel in the land of Egypt
 - i. Deuteronomy 4:20: Egypt as 'The Iron Furnace' late Bronze Age Empire, need for cheap labour and increased food stores for armies, expansion.
 - ii. Exodus 1:1-11: Israel as the 'brick-makers' for what? Storage cities of Pithom and Ramses, purpose of increased storage of agricultural surplus.
 - iii. Terence Fretheim states in his excellent commentary on Exodus, "The people of God do not live by bread alone, but they cannot live without bread either."¹ The 'real' needs of the people are for bread, basic necessity of life and one that is PROVIDED WITHIN CREATION.
 - iv. Question as to how the gifts of food are DISTRIBUTED, in ancient world and today!
 - 1. Today: 40% of food in Canada is wasted; grain fed to cattle in the world equal to 1500 calories per day for 9 billion people.
- b.** Egypt in the mind of Israel
 - i. Exodus 16:3: After the Exodus, the Israelites gripe to God and say, "If only we had died by the hand of YHWH in Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, while we ate our fill of bread!"
 - 1. They look back upon their time in slavery as time of 'fullness' – how is it that fullness enslaves us?
 - ii. "It is easier to get the people out of Egypt than to get Egypt out of the people."
 - 1. Food as formation – they have been formed by the false abundance of Empire and need to see a viable alternative. How do the false pretences of our food economy today form us and teach us to see Creation? (All you can eat buffet, Costco, tomatoes year-round)

III. The Exodus and the Feeding of the People of God

- a.** This is about FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS: 16:4, "I am going to rain down bread from heaven, to see whether they will follow my instruction or not." More than just trust in Yahweh, this involves an actual course of action!
- b.** First instruction: 16:16-18, "Gather according to your fam-

¹ Terence Fretheim, Exodus, pg. 184.

ily's need" – how does this contrast with the 'gathering' we do? Is it according to need? Are everyone's needs met? In God's Economy, there is enough to meet all needs.

c. Second instruction: 16:19-20, "Do not store it up!" – how does 'storing up' echo across the rest of Scripture? What is the problem with storing up? How do the limits set by the first and second instruction keep greed in check?

d. Third instruction: 16:6-7, Remember Creation. "In the EVENING you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the MORNING you shall see the Glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD." The whole story is framed in the same day-to-day rhythm as seen in the original creation. Israel, by eating in this particular way, is harkened back to the rhythm of Creation and rooting itself in the life-giving seasons of God. Food is a daily opportunity to remember creatureliness.

e. Fourth instruction: Connected to the first three! 16:22-30: "Practice Sabbath!" The Sabbath sets the whole rhythm of our days and life around the work of God, respects the basic theological fact that all of our life is a gift to be received. On the Sabbath, we do not 'gather' or work but rather we 'receive as a gift' and 'rest', which is God's design and delight.

IV. How is this story taken into the New Testament?

a. The Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread" – all who pray the prayer of Jesus identify with this story and this way of economic life together.

b. Jesus Feeding: Mark 6 – How does this differ from the Exodus story?

i. Jesus is present with the discipleship community.

ii. The food does not come from 'heaven' but from the community of those present (the bread and fish that they collect).

iii. Through the blessing of Jesus and the offering of the discipleship community there is abundance for all there (not only is there enough but there are leftovers!).

iv. Jesus' call to the disciples: "You give them something to eat!" puts a certain focus on what we already have and can share rather than on simply asking God for more.

c. Paul's collection for the poor in Jerusalem: 2 Corinthians 8:10-15

i. The call is for those who have more to be generous

(Should we in the first world identify with the Corinthians or those in Jerusalem? With the Israelites or with Egypt?)

ii. This is not charity but a matter of justice, v.13: "Not that others be relieved while you are hard pressed but that there might be equality"

iii. And what is the punch line for WHY this is necessary? "The goal is equality, as it is written, 'The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.'" The Exodus story is the justification for Jesus' identification with YHWH and for the discipleship community to identify with the people of God.

iv. For us today? How might we in the interest of 'equality' begin to identify more deeply with this fundamental call of discipleship?

V. Inhabiting the Story: Remembering Creation

a. Habits and practices which promote the equitable distribution of food:

i. Within the 'system' today

1. Fair-trade
2. Local
3. Certified Organic

ii. Alternatives to the 'system'

1. Farmers Markets, CSA's, backyard gardens
2. Buying clubs, bulk foods, etc.
3. Get to know your neighbour!

b. Drawing our 'food life' into our discipleship on a daily basis as a way of remembering Creation. Putting us back in touch with the soil and the farmers, with those that work the ground on our behalf, perhaps with the ground itself.

c. Food as a means of Grace and Thanksgiving: Learning to really pray prayers of thanks over food that has truly blessed the land itself, the farmers who grew it, and then those who consume it. How to work this into a rushed life?

STORIES/ ILLUSTRATIONS

How much do you spend on a nice dinner? How much on lunch if it is fast food? (80% of world population lives on less than \$10 USD per day.²)

- Research instances of food inequality in your local area or region, pay specific attention to the plight of migrant workers' wages, working conditions, etc. and if these folks are visible?

SERMON GUIDE

FOOD AND FAITH

- Describe your most memorable meal to begin. How is it that so many of life's most precious moments surround the table? What is the smell? Sound? Feeling? Mood? Etc.
- Consider using a clip from "Food, Inc." or another similar film.
- Can you tell a story of hope that you have seen in the food movement over these past few years? What dreams do you have for your Church to enter into this work?

APPLICATION TOOLS

Invite the Congregation to explore together new practices around Food – fast from meat, invite your neighbours to dinner, put different family members in charge of prayer before dinner, eat dinner as a family, source one meal per week within 100 miles of home, etc.

Plant a community garden and invite a mix of people to tend it together.

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