

Soul Food - John 4:27-45
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
Union Baptist Church – 8/5/2018

I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Does anybody here enjoy food? Aren't you glad God made food taste good? That fact itself tells you something about God and his goodness and his care for people! Great tasting food is one of the many blessings *the Lord who Provides* gives to us every day. And think about it. He could have just given us bland tasting food that we had to force ourselves to eat just because if we didn't, we'd die. Or he could have left off our taste buds, so that we had no capacity to enjoy great tasting food. But that's not our God, is it? He created great tasting food that reproduces itself and he gave us the capacity to savor it and enjoy its flavor. He does all things well, and he pours out many of his blessings on all people, whether they love him or not. As Jesus himself said: "[The Father] ***makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust***" (see Matt. 5:45).

Well, if you're like me, you REALLY like food, and you REALLY hate to miss a meal. You consider food one of the highlights of every day! In fact for me, it's one of the essential elements for getting in the right frame of mind each day. Right after my warm, comforting shower, the next order of business is coffee, cereal, an egg, orange juice and a multivitamin. And I get kind of grumpy in a hurry if this routine is disturbed. For instance, if Mindy gets up and tries to get me busy doing something before I've had a chance to eat my breakfast and drink my coffee. Does your spouse ever do that to you? Bad idea, spouses!

Well, hopefully you're not in as big a rut as me with your breakfast routine. Some of you don't even eat breakfast, for some weird reason! But I want you to think about this for a moment: What things in your life cause you to forget about food temporarily so that you skip a meal and hardly even notice that you did? For some of you, like me, there are precious few things that can make that happen! But when you think through your own life, when have you skipped a meal and what caused you to do it? What has the ability to cause you to forget about food temporarily?

Perhaps it was when you were upset about something and you lost your appetite. Or maybe it was when you were so focused on accomplishing something or getting something done, that you didn't want to waste time eating (Mindy!). But can you think of a time when you were so excited about something good or so engrossed in it that you temporarily forgot about food? You were finding great joy or purpose in something that pushed your desire for food to the side for a time. Well, as we turn our eyes and ears and minds to Scripture this morning, we're going to see this very thing happening to two people. They temporarily lost their desire for both water and food because their hearts were set on something much more satisfying.

Turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to John chapter 4, where we'll be finishing Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman in verses 27 through 45. If you'll remember, Jesus just made the jaw dropping statement to the Samaritan woman that is he is the Christ, the Messiah. As she had attempted to delay her decision about where and how it was appropriate to worship God...until the Messiah came, Jesus took away her excuse as he told her: "***I who speak to you am he.***" And just as he completed that amazing statement, we pick up the account in verse 27.

II. SHARING THE GOOD NEWS (John 4:27-30)

So let's see what happens now in verses 27 to 30, which I've labeled in your sermon notes: *Sharing the Good News*.

27 Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" 28 So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" 30 They went out of the town and were coming to him.

At the very moment Jesus finished saying he is the Messiah, the disciples arrived back from town with food for lunch. And we're told they were very surprised and wondering in their minds why he was talking to a woman alone at the well. Their surprise doesn't seem to be just because she was a Samaritan, but because she was a woman. Jewish religious teaching "...warned men not to talk much with

women..., both because of temptation and...because uninformed observers might suspect misconduct. Traditional Greek and Roman culture also considered it inappropriate for a wife to talk with men in unguarded settings” (*IVP Bible Background Commentary*). And the fact that this woman was also a Samaritan surely added to their wonder about what Jesus was up to.

But the disciples had been with Jesus long enough already to know that he commonly disregarded social customs and barriers in his concern for accomplishing God’s will and caring for people no matter their background. Though they could have questioned him or tried to rebuke him, they respected him and trusted that he had godly intentions in this situation. Of course you and I are not sinless like Jesus and are much more susceptible to giving into temptation than him, so we shouldn’t take this as license to disregard common sense protections against temptation. Being alone in a tempting situation with a person of the opposite sex is still something we should always avoid. However, we can learn a lesson from Jesus here, and that is: accomplishing God’s will and sharing his good news with people of all backgrounds and social status, is much more important than worrying about what people will think or about breaking accepted human social customs.

Well, as the disciples arrived and the woman’s conversation with Jesus came to an abrupt end, we notice that in her amazement and excitement about what Jesus had just said – *the offer of living water from the Messiah himself* – she forgot how thirsty she was. She forgot why she had come to the well in the first place. The satisfying of her soul-thirst became much more important than the satisfaction of her physical thirst. Leaving her water pot at the well, she rushed back to town to share this exciting news with her people. She invited them to come and see a man who told her everything she ever did. Could this be the Christ?! And guess what? The people noticed something different about this woman as she publicly testified and decided to believe her and go see this man. Whatever this woman’s reputation was in town, she must not have been a liar!

And as we think about this woman and her testimony, we’re reminded that being willing to open our mouths and actually speak to others about the good news of Christ and our faith in him is necessary for others to come to know and believe in him. If she had kept this great news to herself because she was afraid people would laugh at her or think she was crazy, a whole town would have missed out

on the living water Jesus was offering. But as she took a great risk and boldly shared what she had experienced, inviting others to come and see for themselves, the people in the town heard what they needed to hear, followed her and started coming to Jesus!

III. EATING INVISIBLE FOOD (John 4:31-38)

Well, as the woman shared this good news in town, Jesus and his disciples were still at the well. Let's see what was happening there in verses 31 to 38, which I've labeled: *Eating Invisible Food*. Picking up in verse 31:

31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." 33 So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. 36 Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37 For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

"Eat, Santa. Eat!!" I keep hearing that in my head as I read these verses. Like Santa's wife, the disciples were quite concerned that Jesus put some food in his body. Santa's wife just wanted him fattened up so he would look like Santa's supposed to look, but the disciples were concerned about Jesus getting needed food for their continuing journey. After all, they were expecting to be moving on from Samaria as soon as they finished lunch. But unbeknownst to them, Jesus, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, had much different plans. And he was at the moment completely uninterested in the food they had brought from town. You see, he was having that experience we talked about in our opening today: He was so excited about and engrossed in something so much more fulfilling than physical food, that he'd lost interest in eating for the moment. And that's because he was already eating soul food and preparing for a great feast that was about to be harvested and laid out before both him and the disciples. As such, he

responded to the disciples' continuing pressure to eat by telling them: ***"I have food to eat that you do not know about."***

Of course, just like you and I probably would have done, the disciples took Jesus statement literally and assumed somebody must have already given him some food. Perhaps it was the woman. Or did one of the disciples give him some food while the others weren't looking? This is a continuing challenge that has already happened several times in what we've studied of the gospels so far and continues to happen throughout Jesus' ministry. Jesus makes a statement intended to reveal a spiritual truth, but people take it at face value and struggle to move on to the deeper spiritual truth. You see, Jesus' method of teaching, a method we should learn to use ourselves, used earthly things people understand from their daily lives to help them discover and understand spiritual realities...how life works in God's invisible kingdom.

One of the beauties of this teaching method is that the initial statement leaves people confused and wondering, which then provides a natural opportunity to clear up the confusion and explain the spiritual reality at hand. This method also enables people to come to an understanding of spiritual realities based on their understanding of things they've actually experienced in their daily lives. But just as the disciples struggled here to move on to the deeper spiritual reality, we also need to be careful as we seek to understand Jesus and his teachings in the gospels not to just stay on the surface and view Jesus' teachings and commandments as just a list of rules and regulations we need to externally comply with. Instead, we need to pay attention to his underlying spiritual principles which are always aimed at heart transformation, and not just behavior change.

Well, fortunately, Jesus was happy to explain to the disciples what he actually meant by this food they didn't know about. In one simple sentence he clearly defined for them what kind of food he was talking about. He said: ***"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."*** In other words, doing God's will and accomplishing his work by his power is delicious and satisfying food for the soul that can even cause us to temporarily forget about our next mealtime. And for some of us, that would be quite a feat! Do you currently view the doing of God's will and the accomplishing of his work in this way? Don't we often view it in a negative light?...As something we know we should do, but

that's really gonna cost us and make us miss out on what we'd really like to be doing.

Well, my friends, that's a lie that we too often believe! The truth is: there is nothing better and more soul-satisfying than obeying God's Word and accomplishing his purposes by his power. When we learn to live this way, we're walking into life as it was meant to be...the way God designed us to live. Will we miss out on some things the world views as fun and entertaining? Absolutely. But it will be like giving up the worst meal we could imagine for the best meal we've ever tasted in our lives. For me it would be like giving up liver and onions for fresh, inspired sushi with just the right amount of wasabi and ginger! When we can say like Job did: "***I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food***" (Job 23:12) – then we'll be enjoying the best soul food available, like Jesus was here in John chapter 4.

Well, now that Jesus had clarified for the disciples what kind of food he was talking about and that it was so good he was uninterested in regular food at the moment, he moved on to help them understand where he was getting this food. And he did this with a farming analogy...once again explaining a spiritual reality with a physical reality the disciples were sure to understand. Referring to a common saying people used at this time – ***There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest*** – he said that in this case, a spiritual harvest is already upon us. We don't have to wait four months for this one to be ripe. With the power of God at work in hearts, a 4-month wait isn't always necessary for this kind of harvest.

*Look up! Do you see the crowds coming to us right now from the town of Sychar? **The fields are white for harvest.** The Holy Spirit and I have been laboring in God's field while you've been gone. I've been planting and watering seeds here while you've been gone, the Holy Spirit's been causing great growth, and already these seeds have ripened into mature plants with fruit ready to be picked. Get your work clothes on. It's time to do the harvesting. And guess what? The wages and the reward for gathering this harvest are way beyond worldly money that comes and quickly disappears...that you enjoy for moment and then it's gone. The wages you get from reaping this harvest and the fruit you gather will endure for eternity and bring you great and lasting joy. And it's delicious and soul satisfying. But not*

only that. Even though in this case you had no part in planting and watering and weeding, you're going to share equally in the wages and the fruit that's harvested. This is a team effort and everyone shares in the benefits and rejoices together, no matter what part they played in the process.

Do you think the disciples were still confused about this harvest? Probably. This was a lot to take in. But as the Samaritans from the town of Sychar arrived and they witnessed and took part in what was about to happen, my guess is, they began to understand better the spiritual realities Jesus was talking about here. They enjoyed the delicious soul food of helping people find hope and salvation and new spiritual life in Jesus Christ, and they found great joy together with Jesus in the process. When it comes to good tasting soul food, the most delicious and satisfying is planting seeds of the gospel, watering them, and participating in the harvest...that moment when the Holy Spirit, the living water, awakens someone's heart to believe that Jesus is indeed the Savior of the World, and they accept him as their personal Lord and Savior. That's the sushi of the soul food world!

IV. REAPING THE HARVEST (John 4:39-42)

Well, as Jesus spoke to the disciples about this harvest that was ready to be reaped, the Samaritan crowd began arriving at the well. And let's read in verses 39 to 42, what happened from there. I've called this section: *Reaping the Harvest*. Picking up in verse 39:

39 Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

It's so important for us to notice here the key factor that led to these people believing in Jesus as the Savior of the world...the "because of" statements. Notice that many believed *because of* the woman's testimony, and that many more believed *because of* the words Jesus' spoke. This is the way belief in Jesus comes about: Only as people are willing to audibly speak about what they have

come to believe about Jesus and share out loud his simple message of salvation. As Paul shared with us in Romans 10, verses 13 to 15 and 17:

13 ..."everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" ... 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

My friends, just as the Father sent Jesus to do his will and accomplish his work, he also sends each of his children, all those who've believed in Christ, to be his ambassadors...those who represent him and carry out his will on earth and preach his message of hope in Christ. Preaching, you may have noticed, involves opening our mouths and sharing a message publicly. But preaching is not just something that pastors do. Preaching is not just done in a pulpit. Preaching is simply sharing with others important truths from God. The Greek word translated, "preach," simply means: to publish or proclaim openly, and is especially used in Scripture of publicly proclaiming the gospel (*Blue Letter Bible*). Faith in Jesus comes from *hearing* the message of his gospel. People can't believe in Jesus if they haven't heard his message, and they're very unlikely to hear his message if we aren't willing to openly share that message with them.

But the amazing reality we've uncovered today in our passage, is that – far from being an uncomfortable drudgery that we have to do because we know we should – sharing the good news of Christ with other people is soul satisfying food for our souls that will bring eternal benefits and rewards for us both now and in the life to come. And it comes with great and lasting joy. We'll find nothing more fulfilling in life than participating in the planting, watering or harvesting of souls – people brought from death to eternal life by the power of Christ!

And in verses 39 to 42 of John chapter 4, we see that there was a great harvest going on among the Samaritans as the seeds Jesus had planted with the Samaritan woman had grown into healthy plants producing perfectly ripe fruit. And notice that as the Samaritans invited Jesus to stay with them and teach them, he was happy to do so. Just ask in humility and repentance, and no matter your

background, or how the world views you, Jesus will come in and stay. **For, “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”**

V. RETURNING TO GALILEE (John 4:43-45)

And this brings us to our final three verses for today, verses 43 to 45: *Returning to Galilee*. Picking up in verse 43:

43 After the two days he departed for Galilee. 44 (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.) 45 So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they too had gone to the feast.

After causing the disciples to marvel again by staying for 2 days among people with whom “Jews had no dealings,” Jesus and his disciples then continued their trek back to Galilee. And we see that interesting and somewhat confusing parenthetical statement: ***(For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.)*** What I think John is telling us here is that Jesus was heading back to an area of much less political unrest – back to a place off the political power radar – and a place where many people had known him as an ordinary, but godly man during his growing up years and would be less likely to try and make him the leader of a political movement. For the time being, to accomplish God’s purposes in his timing, the Spirit was leading Jesus out of Judea and into the quieter area of Galilee.

But as he arrived, the people from Galilee warmly welcomed him because they had also been in Jerusalem for Passover where they had witnessed what Jesus had done there. This welcome, however, was not in all areas, as we’ll soon discover in our study when he returns to his hometown of Nazareth. But this is where we’ll leave off for today.

VI. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

But as we wrap up today’s message, let’s review and solidify what we’ve seen today in this important passage and how it applies to our lives today. To sum up what I believe is the central point of this passage, I would express it this way: *Doing God’s will by planting gospel seeds and watering them brings a delicious*

and joyful harvest of soul-satisfying food. SAY IT AGAIN. What I really believe will be life-changing for all of us is when we more and more truly believe in our souls that doing God's will and accomplishing his purposes is the best and most fulfilling way to live life...when we come to know and love and delight in Jesus so much that he becomes everything we want and his ways and commandments and priorities are seen by us as the best way to live life. Lord, bring that about in each of our hearts and minds. May doing your will become soul-satisfying food to us that causes us at times to forget to eat because we're so excited about what you're doing and where you're leading us.

As we moved through this passage today, did it occur to you that you and I are farm workers? Together, as disciples of Christ, we're to be planting seeds in a field, watering them and harvesting them at the appropriate time. One of us might plant a seed. Another may do the watering. And perhaps someone else will do the harvesting. Or we may be privileged in some cases to do all three. But no matter what part we play in the process, the wages and the reward are equal and benefit us for eternity, and we can rejoice with great joy together at the harvest, no matter who gets to do it.

The seeds we plant are the words we speak to other people about Jesus and his good news. We plant them in the soil of people's hearts and minds. And the only way we can plant these seeds is by communicating in words or perhaps, on occasions, in writing, what we've come to know and believe about Jesus and his message of salvation. We can water the seeds in lots of ways, including acts of service and by being godly people who actually live God's Word. But that old familiar saying: *Preach the gospel and if necessary, use words* – while containing some significant truth, is inadequate. We must at some point speak audible words that communicate the gospel to other people. They can't believe a message they haven't heard. And there's nothing like a believing person who shares that belief in words with another person, to effectively lead others to believe as well.

Are you working on our field? Can you think of any seeds that you've planted or watered recently? I hope so. Remember, we're missing out on the best food available and the most rewarding and joy-inducing work out there when we aren't planting, watering or harvesting seeds of the gospel. Remember, you're not responsible to cause the sprouting of the seed or the growth. You just plant

and water and the Holy Spirit causes the growth. But the amazing thing is, he lets us witness or participate in the amazing harvest when it comes and your reward now and later in heaven will be much more than you've ever hoped for! Let's start planting, watering and harvesting together, family!

Perhaps there's someone here today who's wondering about what this good news of Jesus is all about. Let's plant a seed right now and maybe the Holy Spirit will cause it to grow and even be harvested today! The message that brings eternal life is so simple. All of us have sinned. We've done things we know are wrong. We've denied God our Creator and brought shame to him by living as if he doesn't exist and that the world and human beings he created and is right now holding together are simply the result of random chance and accident. This has put us under God's wrath and subject to his judgment for our sin. The Bible says the wages of sin is death. But God, while we were still sinners, sent his only Son, Jesus, to live a sinless life and then die in our place on the cross – paying the penalty we deserved for our sin and bearing our shame. Then proving that the penalty was satisfied and our shame had been dealt with forever, he rose to life again on the third day, appearing to hundreds of people, many of whom were later martyred because they insisted they had actually seen Jesus alive from the dead.

Now to receive the benefits of what Jesus did for us on the cross – which are *forgiveness of sin, new spiritual life, peace with God, adoption as God's child, God's Holy Spirit living inside and empowering you*, and so much more – *Jesus simply asks you to repent and believe in him* – to repent of your sin, believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead, and invite him to be your personal Savior and the One in charge of your life from here on out. That's it. To repent is simply to acknowledge and own your sin and change your mind about it with a desire to go in a different direction. To believe is simply to trust that Jesus is who he says he is and to want him for yourself.

If there's anyone who would like to do that today with a simple prayer I will lead you in (*see below*), I want to invite you to come forward after we celebrate Communion today. Communion is a time of remembrance of what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. If you haven't yet trusted Christ for salvation and prayed to accept him as your Savior, please don't partake of Communion today, but just use this time to reflect on what Christ has done for us on the cross.

Then I'll give you an opportunity after Communion to come up and pray with me. Holy Spirit, if there's someone here today who's ready for you – please give them everything they need to understand the simple gospel and the courage to come forward after we celebrate Communion. We know nothing is impossible with you and we would rejoice so much to see someone come to know you today.

A Prayer to Accept God's Free Gift of Salvation

*God, I admit that I have sinned against You...
I turn from that sin right now...
I don't want to live my life that way anymore...
Jesus, I believe that you died on the cross for my sins...
And that you rose from the dead...
Right now, I put my trust in You alone for my salvation...
Jesus, You are my Lord and my Savior...My life is Yours...
Thank you for forgiving my sins and making me a new creation...
Thank you for giving me Your Holy Spirit and adopting me as your child...
Teach me through Your Word how to live life with You...
Amen.*