

## Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – August 16, 2015

### Hebrews 5:11-6:3

11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. 1 Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And God permitting, we will do so.

If you are looking to lose a little weight, you might search for diet plan to follow. There are countless options that are out there to choose from, some may work well for you while others may not. Here is a top five list of diet tips that someone put together: 5) If no one sees you eat it, it has no calories. Along the same lines, 4) calories don't count if you eat with someone and you both eat the same amount. 3) Snacks eaten at movies don't count because they are part of the entertainment. 2) Pieces of cookies contain no calories; the process of breaking causes a calorie leakage. And finally, 1) Fatten up everyone around you and you will look thinner. Now obviously someone was having some fun with the idea of diets. None of these will actually help someone to lose weight. But we're not here this morning/evening to find the perfect diet plan to lose weight, although eating in moderation and exercise would certainly go a long way. In our sermon text the writer to the Hebrews uses the illustration of food to discuss our spiritual feeding on God's Word. As we look for our own diet plan for God's Word we will first consider three different human plans and then finally God's Plan for a Healthy Diet of his Word.

The writer to the Hebrews in these verses talks about God's Word in terms of milk and solid food, but before we get to the diet plans that involve those choices, there is another diet to consider. Some make the choice for no food at all, no use of God's Word. This would of course describe all unbelievers. They may have never heard God's Word and so had no chance to feed on it. They may have heard God's Word and chosen to reject it as a diet plan for their lives. Of course, never eating food is not a diet plan. Such a plan can only lead to death, in this case an eternity in hell.

But before we dismiss this first plan as being one only an unbeliever would follow, this is also a plan that some believers seemingly choose to follow. The rationale may go something like this: I learned about Jesus in Sunday school. I studied God's Word in confirmation class. Now I'm finished, I have enough knowledge and I can go on with my life, no more feeding on God's Word is needed. But starving our faith is only a recipe for spiritual death. Our faith will always need to feed to remain strong and will always need a regular diet.

The next diet plan is the milk diet. When it comes to God's Word, milk is the elementary teachings about Christ (v. 1). These are the foundational teachings of God's Word including "repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment" (vv. 1,2). This really summarizes the basics of the gospel: we are sinners who deserve hell. But we repent and believe in God who sent Jesus who rose from the dead. We will rise from the dead and on the Last Day

be declared innocent. These blessings are ours through baptism and the work of those called to serve in ministry through the laying on of hands. This is all included in a milk diet.

Notice that elementary does not mean simple. There are a lot of teachings to cover in just those few short phrases. But this is where we begin when it comes to God's Word. For those who are young and new to the faith we want to focus on Jesus, who he is and what he has done. Just as infants feed only on milk when they are born, so Christians feed on these elementary teachings as they grow in their faith.

Some would say milk is enough for a good diet plan. If we believe in Jesus as our Savior, then the rest doesn't matter. We can discuss the rest of God's Word and agree to disagree on our differences. But the danger in such a diet plan is a lack of maturity. It's hard to watch out for false teaching if one's knowledge is limited to the basics. And if errors are allowed in it will not be long before they spread to the milk and the elementary truths about Christ are lost as well.

And so a solid food diet is needed. Verses 13 & 14: "Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." There is much more to God's Word than knowing about Jesus. He is the foundation and won for us his perfect righteousness. But now how do we live righteous lives in a world of sin? How do we distinguish good from evil? Just as children grow up and learn how to behave and mature, the same is true for Christians as they grow in faith and mature in Christian living.

Some would choose then a solid food diet, focusing entirely on how to live one's life. But if the milk is forgotten or left out, such applications can be misguided. For example, God will let me into heaven because I'm a good person, forgetting the role that Christ has played. Or a church may talk about feeding the hungry, ending poverty or working for world peace. These are all ways for us to show Christian love to others. But if the milk is forgotten, if the message of Christ is left out, such tasks may become empty. They may help people feel good in this world, but they will do nothing for their eternal life.

So the best plan, God's plan for a healthy diet of his Word is one that is balanced—milk and solid food. The two go together. We will always start with milk with those who are spiritual infants but will build upon that foundation to bring in solid food. As we grow in our maturity as Christians we will need solid food to chew on as we make applications in Christian living and defend ourselves against error. But we will also need to review the milk to keep our lives grounded on that sure and solid foundation of Jesus.

So what does a healthy diet of God's Word look like? It will involve worship where we get to begin our week with God's Word in the scripture readings and the sermon. It will involve bible classes where we get to address topics more in depth and learn from the discussion of fellow Christians. It will involve personal bible reading as we eat and drink all parts of God's Word for ourselves. It will involve devotions with family members as we build up the strength our closest personal relationships. Each way has different strengths and values in contributing to a healthy diet plan.

There is no "one size fits all" diet plan. We each are at different stages of life and different levels of spiritual maturity. So as you put together your personal diet plan, a few encouragements. First, increase your frequency. We can never feed too much on God's Word. Verse 14 described it as training by constant use. With the enemies we face, growth will be hard on just one hour of week at church. Second, increase your variety, whether worship or bible study or bible reading or devotions. Different people learn different ways and so the more

exposure to God's Word in different ways can only benefit our growth. The variety of ways allows for more frequent options to feed. Finally, don't lose heart. The devil, the world and our sinful flesh will do anything to get us to stop feeding. No one will ever perfectly follow their plan. If they do, then there is probably some room for expansion. But as verse 3 says, "And God permitting, we will do so." He will give us strength to continue feeding on his Word and growing in our maturity and understanding.

That top five list of diet tips at the start was put together for a good laugh; no weight will be lost using those tips as they are really excuses to keep on eating. And in a way that is the same with God's plan for healthy diet of his Word. The plan is not to eat less, but to eat more—more food and more often. And so we plan for a balanced diet. We drink the milk—those elementary truths about Jesus to remind us of everything he did to make us who we are today. We also eat solid food—digging deeper into God's Word so that we know good from evil and can make Christ-centered applications to every part of our lives. May we continue to feed on God's Word more and more as we "go on to maturity." "And God permitting, we will do so." Amen.