

## ***You Are What You Eat, Part II***

In the name him who gave his body and shed his blood for us, dear friends in Christ: As most of you know, in this year's series of Lenten evening devotions we've been drawing spiritual insights from the Book of the Prophet Daniel – specifically insights that have to do with what it means to be people of faith in Christ Jesus who are living in a largely pagan and unbelieving world. Well, obviously this evening, we don't have a reading from Daniel. I couldn't find anything in his contribution to the sacred Scriptures that relates directly to Maundy Thursday's main themes, which are the Lord's Supper and its institution by our Savior. But, that being said, I do want to return to an idea we discussed earlier in the Daniel series.

It was in our second session, when the reading was about how Daniel and his three companions determined not to defile themselves by eating from the king's table. You will recall that these four young men had been taken as hostages by the Babylonians. They were uprooted from their homes and families in Jerusalem, separated from the worship life of God's people in the Jewish nation, and they were taken away in bonds to distant Babylon. Daniel and his companions were further humiliated by being chosen to serve as eunuchs in king's court, which means they were emasculated and then forced to learn the language, literature, and collective knowledge of their captors. The one perk they got in all his was to be able to eat in the royal mess hall, which would have been quite a lavish affair: the best of meats, the finest wines, the most delectable morsels imaginable. But they turned it all down. They chose instead a very simple diet of vegetables.

Why? It was because they understood a most important truth: that you are what you eat. They didn't want to be corrupted with the fine Babylonian foods because they didn't want to become Babylonians. They knew how easy it would be to be seduced not just with the fancy food they were being offered, but also with the power, the glory, the advanced science and technology – all the stuff that Babylon had to offer, which was (on the surface, anyway) far superior to what they had known in the rustic, backwater land of Judah. So they very carefully filtered what went into them. They couldn't help hearing what their teachers taught, they couldn't help being surrounded by the pagans with all their idolatrous practices and ways; but *they* determined what they would allow to go in to their stomachs, their hearts, and their minds that would become a part of them, and what to reject and leave out. And the way they expressed this was with what they ate physically – the food on their plates – *that* they could control.

And that was the lesson for us. We too live in a culture that is very seductive – we're immersed in it: the materialism, the pursuit of wealth, the shaky values and declining morals of our age—all the stuff that describes life in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. And therefore we too have to watch and carefully filter out the bad stuff, the stuff that is destructive to our Christian faith; because we know that it's true in both a physical and a spiritual sense: you are what you eat. You eventually become what you consume. And if it's necessary to make sure we're not consuming the worst of what our culture has to offer, it's equally necessary to make sure that what we do allow to go in is the good stuff – indeed, the best stuff that the Lord has to offer; namely his holy Word and life-giving Sacraments.

With that in mind, I direct your attention to this evening's Old Testament lesson. It's an intriguing little story; one that's probably unfamiliar to most of us. If you stumbled across it in

your devotional reading you might just pass it by thinking, “Well, that’s weird” and then move on to the next story without giving it another thought. But like so many others, it’s a real gem as we’ll see if we pick it up and examine it a little more closely.

The story is simple enough: a burial party carrying the body of dead man is on its way to the city cemetery, which is located some distance away – outside the safety of the city walls. While they’re out there fulfilling their sad duty, they see a Moabite raiding party coming their way. They know that if they’re caught out here in the open it means either being killed or captured and taken away to be sold as a slave. Neither prospect is very appealing; but apparently it’s too far for them to run back to the city. It’s likely that the Moabites are mounted on horses. They’d be sure to catch them. So the members of the burial party decide to hide themselves in one of the cave-like tombs. They roll away the stone and all clamber inside. In the process, they lay the body of their fallen friend right on top of the bones of the prophet Elisha. And just as soon as they do, the dead man comes to life again, apparently as fit as a fiddle.

Now, in trying to envision the scene inside the tomb, I’m left to wondering who would be tempted to scream the loudest: the guys who carried the dead man out here and are startled when he suddenly revives, or the guy who comes to life only to find himself lying in a tomb on top of someone else’s bones? Of course, no one could scream – as much as they might have wanted to – because they wouldn’t want to have alerted the Moabites to their presence. So everyone’s going, “Shhh!” and trying to whisper an explanation to the formerly dead guy so he’ll know what’s going on. It’s really rather comical. And it wouldn’t it have been neat to be with these guys when the Moabites left and they went back to town with the guy they carried out to bury walking along with them? I’ll bet everyone in town would want them to be their pallbearers when their time came.

Ah, but in trying to figure out what to make of this unusual account, it’s necessary to understand that Elisha in his life was a very Christological character. He was one of the few prophets who performed a lot of the same miracles on a small scale that Jesus would do later on a much grander scale. He was also a straight shooter when it came to proclaiming God’s Word. Like Jesus, he didn’t care whose toes he stepped on when he spoke God’s truth. As a result, he made a lot of enemies – just like Jesus did.

But that’s the connection: Elisha is someone who foreshadows the life and ministry of Christ. And now you’ve got this guy who is quite literally buried with him – and he comes to life. The same is true of us, of course. In Baptism each of us was buried into the death of Christ. In the water, we touched his death—his death for our sin – and *that’s* what made us alive. Elisha, the picture, did it for one guy to illustrate the truth that Jesus does it for us all.

But now here’s my main point: If by touching the death of Christ we were made alive, how much more by consuming his living body and blood given and shed for us shall we live in him and be transformed to become a living part of him? This is what St. Paul is saying in this evening’s Epistle: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” By eating the one body of Christ together, together we become the one body of Christ – because you are what you eat. Amen.

***Soli Deo Gloria!***