OUR SPIRITUAL DIET IS IMPORTANT

1. Live to eat?
2. Eat to live?

I do not think anyone would argue that a good diet is basic to good health. Yet many daily ignore that. They enjoy eating and seem to be less concerned about the nutritional value of the food than about sampling everything that is out there. They live to eat. and so the resultant health problems may cause them to regret their earlier dietary indifference.

The wise person eats to live. He is concerned that his eating habits will result in a sound and strong body. He wants to enjoy good health and a long life. He knows diet is important to attain that.

All this applies to our spiritual life - only here the consequences are either more tragic or more blessed because we are talking about eternity. In eternity there are only two options - eternal death or eternal life. Where eternity is spent depends entirely on the diet with which our soul is nourished. Jesus teaches us: OUR SPIRITUAL DIET IS IMPORTANT. We need to ask ourselves if we live to eat or eat to live.

The importance of diet in spiritual matters becomes evident when we take the time to consider the either/or of eternity. Eternal death in hell is real. Those in hell are totally and permanently separated from God. The torment of hell is so intense that the sufferers will beg even for just the slightest lessening of its agony.

Even as the mind cannot fathom the vileness of hell, it cannot comprehend the glory and blessedness of heaven. There one dwells in the very presence of God, seeing him face to face. There one finds fullness of joy and pleasure forevermore. Nothing is there to detract from that happiness - sin and its effects are not there.

There is only one diet for your soul that will get you to heaven. Jesus declares: I am the bread of life. Of him Peter says: Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. So eat of him. In other words, believe and live. This diet is important.

But we do not always like the diet that is set before us, even if it is wholesome and nutritious. From the child who hates veggies to college cafeteria food and leftovers, there is often grumbling and complaining.

So it is not unusual to find Jews in text grumbling about the spiritual diet that was offered to them. Jesus had declared himself to be bread of life sent by his Father to bring the gift of eternal life to mankind. This did not suit their taste at all. They all be gagged on this spiritual diet that was offered to them. They said: Isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? So how can he say, 'I have come down from heaven'?

There will always be grumbling about the spiritual diet that offers salvation because this diet takes away from man his claim to have a part in his salvation. It is humbling for man to fall before God and plead: God, have mercy on me a sinner. Humility is not something that is natural for man.

Just as cookies, cake and ice cream are more appealing to the child than the meat and potatoes and veggies that are wholesome and healthy, so a spiritual diet that involves man as a participant in his salvation is more appealing than the true Bread of life. Through the ages man has pushed aside what he needs in favor of what he wants and prefers.

Sometimes we complain about the same old gospel being proclaimed to us year in and year out. But that is what Jesus said needs to be done. It is that spiritual diet alone that can free us from the devil, the world and our sinful nature. That is why this diet is so important.

New diets, as well as those who promote them, coming on the market all the time. Sad to say, many promoters of diets are not always concerned about the long-range health of the
dieters. Some seem more concerned about their own pockets than the dieter’s health.

There can be no greater harm inflicted on an individual than the damage that comes from a poorly devised spiritual diet. The world is full of promoters who offer diets which promise great spiritual benefits, but which do not have the means to provide those benefits. It makes no difference whether the deviser of the diet is concerned only about his own gain or whether he is convinced that what he offers is valid and wholesome. If the spiritual food he offers is found outside of Scriptures, there is nothing but harm that can come to the soul.

Our Lord is the only dietitian who knows and understands perfectly what the soul needs. He has the formula for spiritual nourishment that makes the soul alive and strong and healthy. This is found in the Gospel which is **the power of God for salvation**.

By this gospel he takes hearts that are dead in sin and makes them alive by faith in Christ. He takes hearts that cannot see what’s good for them and opens them to know what God has done for them. He takes hearts that oppose God and reconciles them to God.

There is no other gospel. There is no other spiritual diet that can make the soul safe for eternity. Don’t listen to Satan’s promoters who tell you that their diet will get you the same results as long as you use it faithfully. They do not know what they are talking about. Your faith cannot rest on man’s wisdom but on God’s power.

So we need to watch our spiritual diet. There are so many misleading diets in the spiritual world. They all claim to work, but in the end they disappoint.

God provides the perfect diet for life eternal. When we learn from him, we come to Jesus. He is the one who came from God. In him we see what God required, and in him we know that the requirements have all been met. Jesus came to take our place under God’s law. He kept law perfectly for us who cannot. His innocent sufferings and death afforded the sufficient payment for all our sins.

Christ did what the Father, who had sent him, asked him to do. Through Christ’s life and death the Father received full value for every soul. Now he invites: **Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved**.

Here is the perfect diet. It has every ingredient that’s needed for a healthy spiritual life. It is perfect because God himself has designed it to meet the needs of the sin-laden soul. Do you really want to take a second look at any other diet? Here you can eat and live. And the benefits of this diet are lasting.

In the Old Testament, when God’s people journeyed through wilderness, God provided a special food - manna - to sustain them. Although the manna was miraculously given, it was essentially no better than any other earthly food. It could sustain bodily life for only a time. Eventually all who ate of the manna died. Those who lived only to eat of this bread would finally lose the only life they had and that would be a tragic end.

But there is another food that gives another life. Jesus says it is **the bread that comes down from heaven**. The person who eats this does not die. Jesus is that bread of life and whoever believes on him will live. Rather than being dead in sin, we are now dead to sin and alive in God. This puts a whole new perspective on our life. We are now a new creation.

What a joy this new life is. No longer is there that slavery to sin which prevents us from glorifying God in our lives. Paul writes of that effectiveness of the spiritual diet God has offered us in Christ when he says: **He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again**. Out of love we now live a life of service to our Lord.

Where once there was no desire to learn of God, now our heart whispers: **How sweet are your promises to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth**. Where once there was no longing to worship the Lord, now our heart exclaims with Psalmist: **I rejoiced with those who said to me: Let us go to the house of the Lord**. Where once there was a reluctance to extend help and to get involved with others, now there is a willingness **to do good to all people**,
especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

In these ways everything is turned around for us because we are alive in God. Oh, our will and our desires are not all perfect yet, but because we live in Jesus, the bread from heaven, it is our faith and not our flesh that is holding the reins. That is living. What a perfect diet.

This diet is different than most others. With most diets, you have to watch what you eat and cut back or limit the intake of food.

But that is not the case with Jesus’ diet. The difference is that most diets are programmed to lose weight or to maintain a constant and ideal weight. The diet that Jesus offers is to produce growth. Peter urges: Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Our bodies develop and grow to maturity. Once they have reached that point they need nourishment only to maintain the status quo. But faith does not reach its full maturity in this life. It needs constant sustenance so that it can grow and grow. Faith does not become overweight. Instead, as it grows it develops good spiritual muscle tone, becomes firm and strong. It keeps maturing and so finds itself always in better shape to meet and ward off its foes.

But faith needs to be nourished properly. That is why Jesus urges us to eat all we can of the bread of life, of the gospel that unfolds the victory he has gained for us on the cross. In the certainty of forgiveness that we find in Jesus, we can say to Satan: Away from me.

It is one of the ploys of Satan to make us think that we can get too much of the bread of life. People say they had it stuffed down their throats when they were children, they do not need any more of it now, nor are they going to do the same thing to their children. Such attitudes play right into Satan’s hands.

That does not agree with the Psalmist’s appreciation for the bread of life. He writes: The law fr your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold. Or with the Bereans of old who received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day, or with the encouragement: let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Peter writes: Crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it, you may grow in your salvation. You cannot get too much of this good thing.

This is a diet that lives up to its promises. It is one that does produce. Jesus says: If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. Eating of that bread is believing in the Savior. Scripture tells us: He who believes has everlasting life. The Lord guarantees that no one who eats of it will ever be disappointed. It carries with it the sure hope of eternal life, all because of Jesus.

Some people live to eat, to enjoy whatever this life has to offer. We eat to live, so that we may enjoy the blessings eternity has to offer. Jesus is no fad. He is for real. He is the bread of life. Eat and live. Amen.

Pastor Keith Bilitz
St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Alma City
Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church, Smiths Mill