

Grace Lutheran Church
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10th Sunday after Pentecost, August 1, 2021
Sermon: “Non-Perishable” (John 6:27), by Rev. Nancy M. Raabe

Our daughter Margaret and son Martin have been very health-conscious for many years—that is, after Marty outgrew his childhood craving for Cheetos and orange soda, a combination that did not go well for him on car trips!

Years ago, Margaret gave me this book [*Eat This, Not That*]. It has a lot of useful information, but mainly it reminded me that much of what we grab from supermarket shelves is potentially harmful to our well-being. One catchy rule the book gives when you go food shopping is to “work the edges” – that, is, spend most of your time along the walls where the healthiest food is found, and try to avoid the inner aisles which are filled by things in boxes, bags and cans that contain “a chemistry class worth of manufactured ingredients.” Mainly because of these, which guarantee a long shelf life, we call those foods “non-perishable.”

But didn’t we just hear Jesus say, “Do not work for the food that perishes” – which in a grocery store would be the healthy food that does expire?

To sort this out, let’s step out of the supermarket and into the Gospel. Jesus has just come from the miracle of the loaves and fishes. The hordes of people are determined to follow him. Under the cover of night Jesus and his disciples have tried to steal away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, but the crowds still find him.

When Jesus turns to address them, it is not with a greeting but a reprimand: “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” He is disappointed they didn’t see the miracle as a sign of who he is, the Son of God. All they are looking for is another fancy food trick. So Jesus tries to prod them into thinking about more than that: “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”

The food that endures for eternal life: OK...[referring to *Eat This, Not That*] – out goes Hamburger Helper. I already knew that. Out goes Rice-a-Roni. I kind of suspected that. Out goes Quaker Cheddar Cheese Rice Snacks. Really??

Here is the irony: Heavy consumption of these “non-perishable” items, many of which are staples of the American diet, are likely to cause US to perish, the classic definition of “perish” being “to suffer complete ruin or destruction.” In large quantities, the chemistry class of manufactured ingredients IS going to bring us down one way or another. So let’s ask: What other staples of our daily diet do we consume every day which also may be causing us to perish? And how can we embrace, instead, the food that endures for eternal life?

- Let’s take our craving for affirmation.
 - Do you look to the world for affirmation? Do you seek the approval of others before you’re able to recognize that you’ve done a good job? Do you let negative comments cast doubt on abilities that you know you have?
 - OR, do you look to Christ for affirmation? Do you remind yourself in the midst of whatever is happening that you are a beloved child of God, fully loved and fully forgiven, and that the gifts God has given you are enough for the work God has called you do to? Affirmation in Christ is food that is truly non-perishable.

- How about our craving for security?
 - Do you look to the world for security? Do you surround yourself with stuff that makes you feel important and powerful—the latest gadgets, the coolest sneakers, the trendiest patio furniture? Do you stockpile money or possessions in far greater quantities than you need, in a way that serves only to isolate you from others?
 - OR, do you recognize that Jesus Christ gives us all the security we need? That he is our rock, our fortress, our salvation? That when we are down, he picks us up; when we are weary, he bids us to come to him; when we are on the verge of despair, he whispers in our ear that life, eternal life now and forever, is ours in him, that his life is ours and his victory over death is our victory. Security in Christ is food that is truly non-perishable.

- What about our desire for personal improvement? Do you throw all your eggs into the basket of self-help programs like this 10-step path to happiness?

<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Be authentic.○ Learn the power of now.○ Be realistic.○ Know your priorities.○ Learn to let it go.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Control your options.● Be grateful.● Celebrate along the way.● Give to others.● Invest in “you.”
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All that is fine but the problem with these kinds of programs is that they don't tell you how. HOW am I supposed to totally change my behavior? How do I stop being the anxiety-ridden, selfish, unrealistic, ungrateful person that I am?

Only faith in Christ can bring about that re-orientation, faith that is a gift from God and which grows mysteriously like manna from heaven *if only we believe*. Now intrigued, the people ask Jesus, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" – meaning, how are we to live as people of God? ²⁹Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

Belief in Christ is food that is truly non-perishable. Believe in him. A perfect three-word recipe for the food that endures for eternal life. Three words that change everything. Three words that are now yours, your very own, because through the living Word that you just heard, the Son of Man has given them to you.

Amen.