

“Good Gifts”
Psalm 145:9-17; Isaiah 40:25-31;
2 Corinthians 8:10-15; Luke 11:5-13

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Have you been out and around at all and seen all the decorations? Have you gone to the mall and heard the music and the invitation to buy some stuff? It all seems designed to help us buy more stuff. I go into a store and look at all the stuff and realize I'll never have it all. It leads me to wonder how much is enough? What actually satisfies? What is it that truly satisfies?

As I was reading through the psalm for today, I noticed that the psalmist said that God gives food to all and opens his hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing. That's quite a statement. It made me begin to think about where we look for what satisfies. There's a parallel here between “gives food” and “satisfies.” I was thinking about how last week we talked about the living water and how it is an essential element of who we are. It's part of our body, and there is the metaphor that we need the living water of God. We also need food. We need food that energizes the body. Sometimes we call bread the staff of life because it's so basic to what we need and who we are.

It's interesting that just last week, we came and gathered around the table, broke bread together as God calls us to do. Yet even as we think of all that we remember Jesus also said when he was confronted in the desert, “Man does not live by bread alone.” So as much as we think about the food and the bread that the body needs, and as often as we gather around the table where we recognize our bodily needs, we recognize that our need goes beyond physical food as well. There is a way in which we not only see the bread as what gives us life, but we know we need more than that for life. We can have a volume of water that is equal to what's in the body, but it's just water. It's not till the rest of it is there as well, and that it's living and that it's fueled that we have what we need.

As I was thinking about having bread I also thought about what it's like not to have bread. What ran through my mind were those old newsreels of the terrible places like Auschwitz and the other concentration camps. As people were released from there, we saw what the lack of food does to the body. They are stark and terrible images that run through my mind because I've seen those newsreels.

We can see the starvation of our physical bodies. We can see the need for food. Scripture encourages us to recognize that we are more than food, and that “more than food” we sometimes call spiritual or soul. It's the rest of who we are. It means more, but it's hard to see when that is starved. I think it's harder to see the nature of our own souls than it is to see our bodies. But if you thought about those newsreels, what would it look like for our souls to look that way. What kind of food do we need?

I love the questions in Isaiah because I think Isaiah is beginning to try to encounter a people and say, “Have you recognized who the creator is?” He begins with all these questions about God. Do you know the creator? Is there anybody comparable to God? What is the source of all power and strength? He transitions when he says, “Have you

not heard...” Have we heard who the source is? I don’t want to say God is like bread, although in some ways God says that when we take Jesus’ body and think about it in that way. But it’s our relationship to God and the way we encounter and stay in touch with God that is the source for who we are, that powers us as human beings, that feeds our souls.

Now, Isaiah is trying to help God’s people recognize that and they are struggling with it, I think. They are going in the wrong direction. That’s what Isaiah is trying to encourage the people to hear and see. In some ways, it’s the same thing I think Jesus is doing when he’s telling this story about coming and knocking on the door at midnight. Out of food, and will it be given? Even if your friend won’t do it because he’s your friend, if you are persistent enough, he will do it. What he’s suggesting, I think, is that if we come to God, God is going to be much more than that friend, will care more about the one knocking than worrying about getting out of bed. He goes on to say several things about that. If you were to give a gift, what would you put in it? We know better than to put scorpions or snakes in gifts, don’t we?

Jesus is saying God wants to give us good gifts. We need that food. It is what God gives and there’s one step in transition to get there. It’s what Jesus is trying to convince the folks of when they listen to what he’s saying. Just a little bit of trust. A little bit of faith. A little bit of that recognition that what God gives is a good gift that will feed us in ways our souls are hungry for. If we can’t simply hear it, isn’t that what Christmas is about? If we can’t simply hear it, God will come and be in our midst. God will come to us as a baby, as a boy, as a man, and be among us offering the very grace of God that comes through the good gifts of God and the way God feeds us. It simply takes a little bit of trust. Be willing to ask, to search, and to knock. It takes a willingness to hear what God is saying and say, “God, I’ll try that. God, I’ll open my heart to you. God, let me recognize that grace in my life.”

Jesus is talking about good gifts that feed us. So as we go through this coming week, what I would encourage us to do is to keep doing some things we have been doing: think about what we’re thankful for, see something that gives us hope and that reminds us of the hope we are given in Christ. We know we have that hope, so let’s look for it. And then one thing to add to that: how about exercising a little trust? Exercise that trust, exercise that faith. God I don’t know what’s going to happen in that situation, but I will trust you. God I don’t know exactly how to go through this world, but let me trust the gift you have given. In the unknown situation, even in the known situation, trust that God will allow us to work in relationships that are wonderful, and God will continue to work in relationships that need to be healed. Where can we find a place where I can say, “God, I’ll exercise trust this week because I know you give good gifts that feed us.” Amen.

Gracious God, we’re not always sure what really satisfies us. Help us to hear the psalmist and recognize that you do come, that you bring what really satisfies, the food that we need, a grace that enables us to be your people. Help us exercise our faith so that we can receive these good gifts, the food that enables us to be your people, that gives us strength and power, and renews us. Lord, thank you for your gifts, your good gifts. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.