

November 26, 2015
Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Thanksgiving B
Eat and Be Full

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Eat and Be Full! It's an obvious statement for this time of year. Just think about it for a moment with me. Sometime today or later on this weekend you will have your family thanksgiving feast! Perhaps it's already cooking. I am sure the Table will be Full! I can already taste it...A beautiful golden turkey – that is oh so moist and tender. Creamy mashed potatoes...with a few lumps to know they aren't from a box (at least that's the way I like them). Perhaps the sweet potatoes if you enjoy those. And the rest of the dinner...cranberry sauce, rolls, dressing, perhaps corn or the green bean casserole...oh and don't forget the pumpkin pie! And don't be fooled...you will eat more than you say you will...for you always do...and you will be full! And then it's time to sit in front of the TV to watch the third football game of the day...or take a little Turkey nap before you wake up and have some leftover turkey sandwiches. Isn't that what thanksgiving is all about - eating and being full!

Maybe that isn't completely fair! Do you remember the story of the first thanksgiving? The story about Squanto and his tribe providing the Pilgrims with Venison and popcorn to celebrate their first successful harvest. You know...the Pilgrims had a difficult year. They struggled with a rough New England Winter – with disease, with Native Americans that they didn't know – and with hunger. But after the first harvest and a hunt...they celebrated. For three days they ate and were full.

But people knew hunger long before the Mayflower set sail for the new land. They had a gnawing in their stomachs before turkey, dressing, cranberries and the annual Lions and Cowboys games became associated with Thanksgiving. They didn't even have one lean year - they had forty years of hunger wandering in the wilderness. Moses, the leader of the people...stood before the Israelites and shared with them a sermon preparing them to head into the Promised Land and reminding them of where they had been:

² And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. ³ And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. ⁵ Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you.

These aren't exactly..."Thanksgiving memories" for the Israelites. They aren't memories, like your Turkey Dinner, Football Games, or Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

The Israelites had been here before...the edge of the Promised Land, but they were afraid and they distrusted God and turned away from God's promise for them. So God led them through the wilderness for forty years. All they had to eat was manna from heaven. It was left over after the dew disappeared in the morning. The people were fed...but it is unlikely that they woke up in the morning saying... "Sweet, my favorite, more manna! I am so glad we get this every day." It must have been humbling to eat the leftover dew, day after day, counting on God to provide. There must have been days when the testing was more than the trial of patience or concern about the day to day matters of life, but life itself!

Really, the Israelites knew what it was to hunger. They felt their insides not just groan...but shudder because there wasn't food. They had been in anguish. They had been suffering. They had been humbled because they were hungry.

But the story of the Children of Israel doesn't end with them standing before Moses on the wrong side of the Promised Land with hungry insides and their stomachs craving food. Instead, they followed their next leader, Joshua, across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. And what a land it was! A cornucopia of good gifts. Crystal streams all over, in the mountains and the valleys, a land of amber waves of grain rustled in the wind, a land where there were fig trees, pomegranates and vines, a land of olive trees and honey. And God's chosen people entered into that Promised Land of plenty and they all ate and were FULL! The Promised Land that God gave his people didn't center around a day of thanksgiving...but a PLACE of thanksgiving. God delivered on his promise. He gave his people a life of thanksgiving! You see Everyday is a day of thanksgiving when the people of God would eat and be full. Not only would they be full of food...but satisfied. Which means there was more than food...the presence of God was with them in their new land.

This thanksgiving, we look at the Children of Israel and we're a bit jealous. Of course...we know we'll eat and be full...in our stomachs. But we're not just hungry...we are empty. We know all too well what it is to hunger....not for turkey but for words of encouragement. We know what it is, not for our stomachs to grumble and groan but for our whole selves to cry out in despair and distress. We know what it is...not to feel the pangs of hunger because we haven't eaten since supper last night...but to feel the pangs of loneliness, guilt, depression, desperation, and pain. We know all too well what it is to be unsatisfied. We know what it is...not to be separated from food...but to be separated from our family and friends. We know what it is to be empty on Thanksgiving. Everything around us tells us that we have much to be thankful for, but we have a hard time seeing the gifts because of our emptiness. And today this Thanksgiving Morning...we deal with the fear that we might eat but still be empty. We deal with a constant lack of satisfaction. The more we try to satisfy ourselves and others...the more we realize we can't. There is no satisfying us.

In our emptiness and hunger, we're not only like the Children of Israel waiting to enter the Promised Land, we're also like our Savior, Jesus. Jesus hungered. Jesus himself spent forty days in the wilderness with nothing to eat. And HE Was hungry. And in the wilderness...he was also tempted. He knows that it is to have His Stomach cry out. He knew what it was like to be weak with malnutrition. He really knew what it was like to be cut off from others. And while there in the wilderness...Satan came to tempt him. Jesus, humbled to be in a human body that proved its weakness by hunger, tested the devil, quoting words from our OT lesson, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."*

But forty days in the wilderness was not the only humbling thing that Jesus did. Paul tells us in Philippians that Jesus, *"did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."* He made himself nothing...He EMPTIED himself, not only by taking on human flesh, hunger, and thoughts...but by emptying himself completely. Perhaps you could call these your "Jesus leftovers". He left parts of his flesh on the Roman scourge. He left a pool of blood in Pilate's throne room. He left his blood soaked into the cross. He left a puddle of blood and water at the foot of the cross to prove he was dead. And His breath left him when He gave up his Spirit. Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, emptied Himself in death on a cross.

His blood wasn't the only thing he left behind. On the third days, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, left behind his burial garments as he walked out of the grave and back into the lives of the disciples. He had not left for good, but He who emptied himself was now alive again. And St. Paul who tells us how Jesus emptied himself...also tell us and the Church in Colossae of the fullness of Christ, *"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross."*

So now we, along with Jesus' disciples and the people of Israel and King David, "taste and see that the Lord is good!" as Psalm 34 says. David goes on to tell us, *"Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! The young lions suffer want and hunger: but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing."* Even though the young lions have empty stomachs, we have hearts that are full of joy in our resurrected Christ. What He left behind for us is far from "leftovers," instead, it is the center of our faith, the entrée of our spiritual diet. And tonight, we will eat and be full, we taste and see the God's goodness in Christ, and our emptiness is filled.

Even as our emptiness is filled this morning and our hunger will be fed this afternoon or tonight. We will again be hungry and empty. Our leftovers yes will get eaten...even the turkey and pumpkin pie...we will be tempted with loneliness and despair and pain. But the day is coming when Christ will come again. This time, He won't come as a baby and he won't die on the cross. This time...He will come to take us to the Thanksgiving feast that never ends. The prophet Isaiah tells us, *"The Lord of Hosts will make for all*

peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined...He will swallow up death forever; the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.” And on that day, we will be giving thanks, not just for family and food and health (like we do today), but also for the eternal presence of God as we live in a Promised Land, flowing not with streams and produce of Israel, but the with River of the Water of Life and the Tree of Life. And when we sit down at the eternal feast with our Jesus, we will eat forever, and we will be full!

In Jesus Name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.