

Luke 24:13-15

The Rev. Stephanie E. Parker

Eating God

We are what we eat! Do you remember that saying? And now we know that we are even what we eat eats!

“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.”

We are a church in the Liturgical tradition and at the heart of our worship week, by week, we take the bread, bless it and break it just as Jesus commanded and just as Jesus does today in the company of some of his grief stricken followers.

And Luke reports that the Disciples eyes were opened and they knew Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

So it seems that spiritually speaking we truly are what we eat. How we understand Jesus and God determines the nature of our spiritual sustenance and ultimately how we love and live and move and have our being in every aspect of our daily lives.

Growing up I was exposed to a tradition that projected a punishing image of God: the angry father, the dominating lord, and the sovereign judge who would tolerate no dissent or disobedience.

Very early on in my life if not from the very beginning, I intuitively rejected such a toxic, nasty God. It took me a long time to come to a greater articulation of why I reject these things but one of the first of many ideas that have helped me along the way is this simple thought: that we are punished by our sins, not for them.

As writer Carl Coleman says: “God, who is Love, is not in the business of spanking naughty humans. But God also loves us enough to give us the freedom to be whom we choose to be: for good or for ill.

A God who always cleaned up after us would not be a source of authentic freedom.”

He points out the paradox of the God of Love: merciful enough not to condemn, yet truly just, so to let us make our own way in the world — so that the choices we make determine who we are.

The worship of false gods like money or power, the abandonment of one’s self to abusive acts, the perversion of love into sexual consumerism, the triumph of hatred over relationship, and so forth — separate us from the kingdom of God not because of God’s judgment, but because of our own alienation.¹

And the real tragedy of a fearful and frightening understanding of God is that it drives us deeper into shame and alienation.

These appetites of self-degradation combined with a fearful image of God not only alienates us further from God, but combine to form in us unhealthy traits such as inner torment, weariness, blindness, a sense of defilement, and self-rejection. When we choose to alienate ourselves from love, we form ourselves into unloving creatures.²

¹ Paraphrased reflection gleaned from an article by Carl Coleman in *Patheos*

² *Ibid.*

But grace happens, and for as long as we live we remain free to choose again. We can gain a new understanding of God and if we live long enough we discover that while any one vice can drag the entire person down, so, more hopefully, any one act of wholeness or hope can begin to strengthen us in all things.

Our degrading and abusive choices married to the image of a punitive God form us into unhealthy people who carry a kind of spiritual sickness. But, thankfully our loving choices, slowly but surely, form us into regaining what is ours by birthright: the image and likeness of God.

So the question remains, "What is the likeness of God?" Jesus is the image of God. Jesus was the fully human man who possessed the full complement of what Paul calls the "fruits of the spirit." Paul also says that when we receive, and live by, any one fruit of the Spirit such as — authentic love, joy, peace, patience, compassion, generosity, loyalty, tenderness, discipline — we create the space in our hearts for all the fruit, potentially, to take root and grow.³

We are what we eat.

But it is true, such transformation does not happen overnight: indeed it takes a lifetime, if not beyond. But to embark upon the journey is to be on the journey. We are all the road to Emmaus and should we choose to let Jesus enlighten us, this weekly celebration and feast really does become the bread of life.

But first we have to decide and discern who God is before we can be transformed in this meal. This determines who we are and what we will become, even if it does take a lifetime for that to fully and truly manifest.

When we begin to trust God as mercy and joy and to trust God's love for us as revealed by Jesus, we come to find that we are absolutely drawn to the feast God has given us to celebrate every Sunday.

We come to the table to eat grace and compassion and mercy and light and love and unselfishness and forgiveness until it supercharges every atom and cell of our being until we are the very essence of God's love.

Yes, this can take a lifetime of eating Jesus but why not choose to walk this road?

We are what we eat. At this meal we are transformed in a way that urges us to leave this table and go out into the world like those disciples to share the good news and the phenomenal abundance that has been given to us.

The image of God has become too twisted and confusing for too long. Jesus told his followers the sacred stories and how they painted a clear image of God as the one who loves, forgives and even snatches victory out of the jaws of violence and death.

This is what Luke tells us today and this is what Jesus revealed to those dispirited disciples on that dusty road to Emmaus. Today we are given a new opportunity to understand what it means to be invited to this table every single Sunday and to appreciate anew what exactly it is we do here.

We eat Jesus who is the very essence of God's abundant love. And we are given what we need to be this abundant love in our daily lives.

We are people who celebrate and make holy every single Sunday and every time we break bread together we become a deeper part of God's unfolding invitation to the world; the invitation to meet Jesus in deep hospitality, through the sharing of our stories, and most definitely in the breaking and eating of the bread. Amen.

The Rev. Stephanie E. Parker
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Seattle

³ Ibid.