

Pastor Letter: Seasoned with Love (8/28/22)

One of the ways I can always get a look of consternation from my wife is when I make my way to the spice cabinet after she has slaved over a hot stove to prepare a special meal. She likes her food on the bland side while I prefer my food saturated with herbs, spices, and other flavor enhancing seasonings. I have been known to purchase herbs, spices, seasonings, and loose teas from restaurant supplies houses in large quantities. In the past, I have attempted to plant and raise my own herbs in order to enhance my favorite family dishes.

When I served in the military in Germany, we lived in the third-floor apartment above a butcher shop. Since my family owned a meat market, I was interested in how the local German butcher shop operated. I was amazed to learn how the same beef, pork, veal, and lamb could be used in many different tasting sausages. With the addition of various spice blends, simple preparation techniques, and preservation methods, each sausage had a unique flavor and taste profile. I also developed a taste of the various methods of preparing meat with vinegar, wine, and cognac in various restaurants. Just writing about this experience brings to mind wonderful sights, smells, and tastes.

When a group of us visited the Holy Lands, I thoroughly enjoyed visiting open-air markets in Jerusalem that displayed large bins of loose herbs, spices, and seasonings. The air surrounding these individual vendors was filled with the aromas of the various seasonings that the local culture used to prepare their delicious favorite foods. I later learned that Israel was the intersection of several trade routes that supplied these various seasonings from all around the known world. The middle eastern culture has learned to use these seasonings to augment typically bland meats and vegetables.

When I took my first mission trip into the mountains of western Ethiopia, I noticed a unique color on the tin roofs of their individual homes. After visiting several of these small country homes, I learned that the locals would dry their peppers on the tin roofs. As the peppers dried in the hot sun, the evaporating liquid stained the roofs a distinctive red color. These red peppers also tainted their local foods with the red color as well as the distinctive very hot spicy flavor. After cauterizing my tongue and mouth on several occasions at various restaurants, I learned to order my meals with a minimum amount of these extremely hot peppers.

As I learned to prepared various dishes from around the world, I began to appreciate the various seasonal blends that each culture uses to prepare their respective dishes. Exclusive curries are prepared from various seasoning blends in order to provide the specific tastes that each different culture has developed over many years. These unique curries can be used to create the foods that can mentally transport an individual back to their childhood family dinner tables and the many happy memories of food.

It only takes a very small amount of a certain seasoning to enhance the flavor of certain foods. We all quickly recognize when a cook forgot to salt the potatoes or add salt and butter to popcorn. Just a mere dash of an irreplaceable spice completely changes the flavor of our favorite family dishes.

I use this culinary example of various seasoning as a mental picture in order to highlight this week's New Testament passage from the book of Hebrews. The author is developing the concept of using Christian love in every aspect of our walk of faith. The author writes, "Let mutual love continue," (v 13:1). Just as certain seasonings enhance our favorite dishes, Christian Love should be used to enhance our relationships with our

Lord and everyone we encounter. We can readily observe if our favorite dish is missing the proper spices. So too should we readily observe if Christian Love is missing from our relationship with others, even a perfect stranger. The author writes, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it," (v. 2). Extending love and hospitality to a total stranger can be a scary or dangerous occasion, but that is just what our Lord called us to do as faithful disciples. There are times when the stranger may take advantage of our loving hospitality but there may also be that occasion when we can possibly receive an angelic blessing from our loving hospitable action.

The author documents a list of individuals that we should extend our Christian love to, such as prisoners, persecuted individuals, spouses and spiritual leaders. The author suggests we should respond to God's divine love as we imitate the Christian love that was demonstrated by these nurturing spiritual leaders and Jesus Christ, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever," (vv. 7-8). All our daily actions should be seasoned with Christian love so we can demonstrate our Christian faith to fellow believers, potential brothers and sisters of the faith, and even total strangers. We never know how Almighty God can use our simple acts of loving hospitality to further the Kingdom of God.

Seasoning our daily activities with Christian love is a glorious way to offer a sacrifice of praise to the triune God who extended his divine love to us. The author instructs us with the words, "Through him (Jesus Christ), then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God," (vv. 15-16).

Just as sharing a tasty meal with a special person can produce such great joy, so can our simple acts of loving kindness season someone's bland life with the joy of the Lord. Go into the world and share how Jesus Christ has flavored your own Christian walk of faith with someone who needs to taste the delicious resurrected and eternal life of our risen Savior for themselves.

Pastor Larry