

Now that we are two weeks into 2023, did you make any New Year's resolutions? A New Year's resolution is a promise to stop doing everything you enjoy. Someone once said: "May all your troubles last as long as your New Year's resolutions." The most common resolution is to lose weight. I know that this is on my list again this year. The second most common resolution is to exercise more. Most of our resolutions deal with our health, finances and pleasure, but do you have any for your spiritual life.

The Bible teaches that we are more than just our physical body; each of us is actually a living soul. Our souls are created in the image of God. Just as our bodies have certain characteristics and appetites, so do our souls. The soul has an appetite for God – a yearning to be reconciled to its Creator and to have fellowship with Him forever.

Billy Graham said that in our world, we give most of our attention to satisfying our physical appetites and practically none to our soul. Consequently, we are one-sided. We become overweight, while spiritually we are lean and weak. We spend enormous amounts of time and money on the latest diet fads, expensive exercise machines, and health clubs. For many people, these things only demonstrate their pre-occupation with the physical side of life. To be sure, our bodies have been given to us by God, and we are to take care of them in every way possible. But even more important is taking care of our souls. The Apostle Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:8 - "Physical training is good, but training in godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and the life to come"

In reality, the soul actually demands as much attention as the body. It demands fellowship and communion with God. Nothing but God ever completely satisfies, because the soul was made for God, and without God it is restless.

As we begin a new year and consider our resolutions for this year, let's ponder the question: are we getting enough soul food? Now this concern over the proper spiritual diet is not something new. Several writers in the New Testament discussed the need for and the shortage of spiritual food in the diets of the early Christians. One of these is a passage from the Book of Hebrews, which Judy Ballard's Wednesday morning class is studying. Listen to what the author has to say about soul food in the fifth chapter, verses 11 through 14.

Read Hebrews 5:11-14

Have you ever been talking with somebody and suddenly realized that they didn't have the foggiest idea of what you were talking about? It's like when Judy and I were in Socorro, and every Saturday night we provided a hot meal for the college students from New Mexico Tech. Some nights, they would start talking about smart phones, computers and quantum physics,

and I would get that deer in headlights look; I was lost! In this passage, the author of Hebrews has been writing about the teachings of Jesus when he suddenly stops and realizes that his audience may not be ready to comprehend all that he was saying.

They and maybe even some of us today, had become spiritually sluggish, in other words lazy. Instead of growing in their knowledge and personal relationship with the Lord, they were basically just coasting along, going through the motions. It had been 30 years or more since the Holy Spirit had come at Pentecost, and Peter and the disciples had started proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. These early believers had had plenty of time to grow into mature Christians, but it appears that some of them didn't make the effort to learn. Instead they became satisfied with the simple ABCs of the gospel, content to coast along on the mere basics of the Christian faith.

Listen to how the *Message* paraphrases this passage: "I have a lot more to say about this, but it is hard to get it across to you since you've picked up this bad habit of not listening. By this time you ought to be teachers yourselves, yet here I find you need someone to sit down with you and go over the basics of God again, starting from square one – baby's milk, when you should have been on solid food long ago! Milk is for beginners, inexperienced in God's ways; solid food is for the mature, who have some practice in telling right from wrong."

After babies are born, their first food is mom's milk or formula. Months later, a baby begins to eat soft food like applesauce and strained green beans. After the baby begins to cut teeth, they can start eating "solid food," like my grandchildren's favorites – hotdogs and French fries – unfortunately they have copied their grandpa's bad eating habits. Drinking milk in those early months allows the baby to grow. But solid food is necessary for a child to grow into adulthood. Solid food is essential for not only growth, but also for survival and healthy development.

Our text this morning points out something that has plagued the church since its beginning – the fact that some believers refuse to grow up; refuse to become the people that God wants them to become. Many Christians are satisfied with taking baby steps in their spiritual journey. It's like the boy who fell out of his bed one night. He was crying and his mother ran into his room to see what was wrong. She asked him how he fell out of the bed, and he said that he must have stayed too close to where he got in. Many of us are like that, we want to stay right where we got in; we want to stay in the "honeymoon" stage of Christianity and never get down to the business of growing into the image of Jesus Christ; and our lives show it too; 30, 40 or 60 years later, we are still the same people we were with no visible change.

There has not been any significant change in our lives and behavior since we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We still lose our temper, gossip, complain about everything, have a negative attitude, are selfish, proud and don't share the Good News with anyone. We are

exactly the same as the day when we first met Jesus Christ. There has been no transformation in our lives. We have not become the person that God wants us to be. Even though we may have been saved for years, regularly attend church, we are still spiritual infants and, unfortunately have to be treated as one. The Christian journey is like riding a bicycle; you are either moving forward or you're falling off.

Of course, some people may not want to grow up; they don't want to make the effort; they like getting the attention that a baby gets, after all there is always someone to care for you, to feed you when you are hungry, to rock you to sleep, and to come running whenever you cry or need something. Sounds great doesn't it? But is it? A baby always needs someone to be there to support and care for them all the time. But that's not the real freedom that Jesus promised; you are always dependent on others.

I don't know about you, but after a while, I would get tired of strained peas, milk, crawling around on my knees, and people going goo-goo in my face all day long. I would want a big fat juicy steak with mashed potatoes, grits with red-eye gravy, blueberry pancakes, apple pie and ice cream. Are you hungry yet? I can see some of your mouths watering right now. The key issue is that at some point we must learn to walk on our own accord, and build our own personal relationship with the Lord if we are going to survive all the challenges that this life will throw our way, and as most of us know from experience there are a lot of challenges in life, especially today.

When we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and decided to follow Him, we were born again as Jesus described to Nicodemus in the third chapter of the Gospel of John. Jesus entered our lives and the Holy Spirit came to dwell within us. We essentially became "babes in Christ." But just like a baby must grow up, so must we grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior. And from personal experience, I can tell you that life gets better each and every day that you walk with the Lord.

One night, a mother fixed a special meal for her family: turkey with mashed potatoes and gravy, corn, green beans, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie for dessert. It was everyone's favorite meal, especially since it came at a time other than Thanksgiving. The aroma filled the house, and as the children came in from playing in the yard they could hardly wait for dinner to begin. The last child however, appeared only a few minutes before dinner time and sat through the entire meal without eating, even though he loved everything on the table. Why? Because he had filled up on peanut butter cookies earlier at a friend's house. In settling for something good, he lost his appetite for something better. The same principle applies to our spiritual appetites. Some of us don't have much of an appetite for spiritual truths because we have satisfied ourselves with lesser things; things of this world that are only temporary and not eternal.

In the Bible, “milk” and “solid food” are common terms for referring to different levels of educational development. In our text for this morning, milk is an image for the basic elements of the teachings of God while solid food describes the mature Christian who is able to distinguish good from evil, to discern what God wants us to do. When the author wrote the Book of Hebrews, Greek was the predominate language. Thus, to say that someone was able to teach was the Greek way of saying that he or she had a mature grasp of the subject. They knew what they were talking about. The difference between milk and solid food is like the difference between kindergarten and college.

When Christians grow they become a different kind of person. They are still human, but a better person. Do you remember the story of Pinocchio? Pinocchio was a wooden puppet made by a woodworker. During the story, Pinocchio changed from a wooden puppet into a real live boy. The same thing happens when a Christian grows, starts eating solid spiritual food; they grow spiritually and become more like Jesus, a different and better person. John Wesley called this “moving on to perfection.” The more we become like Jesus, the more fulfilling our lives become, as do the lives of those around us, our family and friends. In the Beatitudes, Jesus said: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled;” filled with the abundance of life.

And how do we grow, how do we become the person God wants us to be? Our text provides the answer – a steady diet of solid food – in other words, feeding on the Word of God. And by steady diet, I mean daily exposure to God’s Word. We all know that there are certain foods that we need each and every day to grow and stay healthy, and in the same way we need to read and study the Bible each day and feast on the guidance and knowledge that the Holy Spirit opens up to us.

The famous poet H. W. Longfellow was once asked how he maintained a long and happy life. Pointing to an apple tree, the writer remarked: “The secret of the apple tree is that it grows a little **new** wood each year. That’s what I try to do.” No matter what age you are, it is important to continue to grow spiritually, each day, each month, each year, and throughout your life. Such spiritual growth requires constant Bible study. Why not start growing a little new wood right now, by reading at least one chapter of the Bible each day, start using a devotional guide such as the *Upper Room* which is available in the Narthex, or joining one of our Bible studies listed on the bulletin insert?

Can you survive on one meal a day? How about one meal a week? When it comes to soul food, some people try to do that by listening to God’s Word only once a week in worship for twenty minutes. I have often wondered why all of us are not involved in a Bible Study. It is my hope and prayer that everyone of you will get involved in a weekly Bible Study. You will definitely be blessed.

You also grow when your diet includes daily prayer, regular attendance in worship, and participation in service projects where you can show the love of God. The key is to grow in the likeness of Jesus Christ each and every day in this your spiritual home, to become more like Him each and every day in your thoughts, words, and actions. Remember this is your home and we are family; we are all one in Christ; we are here to help each other grow spiritually. If we are not providing the kind of soul food you need, the kind of Bible studies and classes you need or want, please let me know, we will get them for you.

So what does your diet consist of? Are you getting enough soul food? Or are you still on the bottle? If you are still on milk, make a commitment this morning to change your diet to solid food, and begin with the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ. Milk is for babies; God's Word is for the mature Christian; feed on it and see how your life will be enriched as you grow to be the person God created you to be. Amen