

May 19, 2019  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
Acts 11:1-18  
Psalm 148  
Revelation 21:1-6  
John 13:31-35

## ***Weird Food & Breaking Bread Together (with Love for Differences)***

By the Rev. Tom Garrison

I begin this morning with a question: What's the strangest food you have ever eaten? Anybody wish to share?

I use to think that my peanut butter and baloney sandwiches were strange—my wife still thinks that—but if you look online you can find weird foods around the world from fried mealworms and squirrel brains to stink bugs, wasp crackers, pickled pigs feet and tuna eyeballs in Japan.<sup>i</sup>

The Scottish have Haggis—which is minced sheep heart, liver & lungs mixed with onions and suet. While I think I am a Highlander at heart—at least for music—whoever thought Haggis was a good idea to eat, I know not.

Have you watched The Travel Channel show *Bizarre Foods* with Minnesota's own Andrew Zimmern? The chef and TV personality lives in Edina but made a name for himself going around the world and trying delicacies. (I think that's the word they use for stuff that's local and yucky.)<sup>ii</sup>

Well Zimmern and fellow chef and travelogue host Anthony Bourdain independently both agreed that one food they tried in Iceland was one of the worst. It's called Hákarl. Essentially it is rotting shark carcass, buried in a pit to drain poisonous fluids and then hung out to dry. "Disgusting," is how Bourdain described it.<sup>iii</sup>

Well, in our reading from Acts today, news has reached Jerusalem that Peter was not only meeting with undesirables, but dining with them as well. And Mosaic law was very clear. No eating with those considered unclean and no eating their so-called "unclean foods," including no camel meat, no rabbit or pig. No birds of prey, no reptiles, or insects, unless—there was an exception—they had leg joints like grasshoppers.<sup>iv</sup> That's weird.

The rules seem strange to us now, but indications are that Peter was being recalled to Jerusalem by some of his old associates to justify why he had dined with the Roman Centurion, Cornelius, and his family.<sup>v</sup> Cornelius commanded the Roman soldiers at Caesarea. No word on *what* they ate—it probably wasn't SPAM—but it might have been pork.<sup>vi</sup>

Think of the folks who are calling Peter on the carpet as almost a political party. You might call them the “You Are What You Eat Party” and their campaign slogan is thou shalt not eat *that* with those people.<sup>vii</sup>

It was almost as if they were saying, as Eugene Peterson describes, “What do you think you’re doing rubbing shoulders with that crowd? Eating what is prohibited? Ruining our good name?”<sup>viii</sup> So, Peter lays it out for them, step by step . . . How in a vision the Spirit told him to go Caesarea; (the Greek word for “go” means more like go *without hesitation*.) More importantly, Peter hears that he is to *make no distinction between them and us*.

Yet, that’s often what we try to do, even today, isn’t it? Make distinctions between Catholics and Protestants, between Baptists and Episcopalians, between conservatives and liberals. However, the Holy Messenger said: make no distinction between them and us.<sup>ix</sup> The question is what’s the Christian thing to do? And to get more ecumenical about it in our differences with Muslim, Jewish or Hindu peoples, what’s the *loving* thing to do? One commentary says, “Peter spoke with the emancipating mind of his Lord,” when he explained to his detractors that God gave these Gentiles the same gifts he gave the “You Are What You Eat” crowd. Peter puts it on himself, but he’s really admonishing his listeners when he rhetorically asks, “Who am I to hinder God?”<sup>x</sup>

Think of it this way. He’s trying to show them its not about our book of etiquette and all our rules, except one. It’s how you treat people and allow their gifts to be part of the body of Christ.

Later in Acts we learn that Cornelius and his household were not only accepted as believers, but received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including speaking in tongues.

I’ve never experienced that, but I’ll tell you what, a couple of weeks ago when Rev. Jennifer and I were at the Cathedral for Confirmation and we began to say the Lord’s Prayer, only to hear it coming out in other languages, in Spanish and Hmong and KaRen, it was at first disconcerting. It felt like something was being lost to my way of saying that familiar prayer, but listening some more, one felt new strength, new vitality was being added to that prayer in rounds of rich diversity.

Counting today there are only three Sundays left in the Easter season. But that is why it important to revisit the last words of Jesus to his disciples at the Last Supper—another strange meal: the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ as represented in the bread and wine. It was there in the Upper Room that Jesus gave the disciples, and us, a new commandment: “Love one another just as I have loved you.”<sup>xi</sup>

What Christ asks of each of us is to break bread with others different than ourselves, to hear their stories and know their hopes. Christ asks us to love with an unselfish generosity and to use our lives every day to help others not just ourselves with our personal pursuits.

As this Easter season begins to draw to a close, reflect on what that means for you and for our Church. It's not just *Do No Evil*. Love is doing good for others. Who will stand up for justice, for human kindness, for the rights of others? And yet, studies show we're becoming more tribal. We watch our own version of the news that caters to our views. We're becoming *less* empathetic. They've been studying that topic for more than five decades and young people today—raised by us—are 40% *less* empathetic than the previous generation.<sup>xii</sup>

Love is not sitting on the sidelines and being neutral to what is going on in our democracy and in our world. Loving one another implies action. By our actions—by our *intentional* acts of love—everyone will know—should know—we are Christians.<sup>xiii</sup> Can we say that today? Elsewhere, in Revelations, we're told lukewarm commitment is nauseating to our Lord.<sup>xiv</sup>

One thing more about a different kind of love. Revelations envisions the end-times, in part, as the oceans and seas passing away and being no more. Let me tell you we are fast approaching that.

Did you know that there are 25 trillion pieces of plastic debris in the ocean? That's more than 18 billion pounds of man-made plastic trash. To put that in perspective, that's enough trash to cover every *foot* of coastline around the world with five full trash bags of plastic or to circle the Earth 400 times. Estimates are by 2050 there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish.<sup>xv</sup> That's on us. And there are already enough dead zones in the oceans to equal the size of all the United Kingdom.<sup>xvi</sup>

Coral reefs are disintegrating, the water is becoming more acidic, and with warming, 9 trillion tons of glacial ice have melted in just the last 45 years.<sup>xvii</sup> So, what are we doing to love the earth, to care for God's creation? It is not my intent to depress you with these statistics but to take you back to Jesus' call to love, to recap the Easter message, the resurrection reminder, that we must die to the old ways, to be raised to new life. We are to love.

These words about love are the words of a man who knows he's not long for this world says Presbyterian minister Aisha Brooks-Lytle. Jesus dreams of leaving a legacy, she says, a legacy of love. And she asks the question: Will we carry on the legacy of Christ or fall into the temptation to do things our own way, to qualify love and add stipulations to it about what people [or creatures] are worthy to receive that love and who is not?<sup>xviii</sup>

Let us break bread *together*, as the negro spiritual says. As another hymn puts it:

Let us bring the gifts that differ  
and, in splendid, varied ways,  
sing a new Church into being,  
one in faith and love and praise.

Trust the goodness of creation;  
trust the Spirit strong within.

Dare to dream the vision promised,  
sprung from seed of what has been.

Draw together at one table,  
all the human family;  
shape a communion circle ever wider  
and a loving people set ever free. <sup>xix</sup>

Let us be part of making a new heaven and a new earth where we dwell in that Holy City with our Creator who is making all things new and calls us to love extravagantly. <sup>xx</sup>

**Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> See: Hostel World's, "The 50 Weirdest Foods from Around the World," September 5, 2018.

<https://www.hostelworld.com/blog/the-50-weirdest-foods-from-around-the-world/>

<sup>ii</sup> *Bizarre Foods with Andrew Zimmern* began in 2006 and continues today. The Travel Channel describes Zimmern as "possessed by a strong curiosity and, apparently, an even stronger digestive system." Host Andrew Zimmern (a chef and food writer by trade) "traverses the world in pursuit of unusual regional delicacies and startling native 'delights' on the menu, as he tries to ferret out the weirdest foods a location has to offer." Celebrity Chef Anthony Bourdain died in 2018, but previously hosted culinary adventure programs on The Food Network and CNN, among others.

<sup>iii</sup> Hákarl. See: entry # 8 on the list. Here is a picture:



<sup>iv</sup> *Dictionary of the Bible*, definition of clean & unclean animals, John L. McKenzie, Bruce Publishing Company, p. 141. He notes, additionally, on page 143, that the Pharisees interpreted these religious food laws with "frantic rigidity."

<sup>v</sup> *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IX, Abingdon Press, 1957, page 142.

<sup>vi</sup> Minnesota's own product—SPAM—aka "Mystery Meat," is made of chopped pork shoulder meat, ham and potato starch. By the way, it's #7 on the list of the 50 weirdest foods cited above.

<sup>vii</sup> Interpreter's, cited above, alternately suggests, these Pharisees could have been labelled "The Circumcision Party."

<sup>viii</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*, NavPress, 2002, p. 1509

<sup>ix</sup> Acts 11:12

<sup>x</sup> Interpreter's, p. 142, for "emancipating mind"

<sup>xi</sup> John's gospel, written later than the others (circa 90 A.D.), places the Last Supper at Passover. According to L. Michael White, Professor of Classics and Director of the Religious Studies Program University of Texas at Austin, "At one point in John 6 Jesus says, 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you will have no life in you.'" But the idea of drinking blood is absolutely abhorrent to Jewish dietary regulations." It's also interesting to note who was present. Jesus called both those who work for the Romans like Matthew (the tax

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collector) and those who are zealously against the Roman government to sit down and dine together, transforming them into disciples working together beyond their previous prejudices.

<sup>xii</sup> “Century Marks,” quoting National Public Radio April 15, 2019 report in *Christian Century Magazine*, May 8, 2019, p. 9.

<sup>xiii</sup> Referring indirectly to the hymn, “*They Will Know We Are Christians*,” by Peter Scholtes, 1966. Scholtes was a parish priest at St. Brendan's on the South Side of Chicago in the 1960s and was looking for a hymn for a series of ecumenical, interracial events. When he couldn't find one, he wrote the famous “They'll know we are Christians by our love” words and hymn in a single day.

<sup>xiv</sup> Revelation 3:16—“So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

<sup>xv</sup> *The Washington Post*, January 20, 2016, quoting a report from the World Economic Forum. See:

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/01/20/by-2050-there-will-be-more-plastic-than-fish-in-the-worlds-oceans-study-says/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.51a7ab44415b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/01/20/by-2050-there-will-be-more-plastic-than-fish-in-the-worlds-oceans-study-says/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.51a7ab44415b)

<sup>xvi</sup> “*Ocean Pollution: 30 Facts That Will Blow Your Mind*,” Drew Brucker, October 9, 2017,

<https://www.rubiconglobal.com/blog-ocean-pollution-facts/> Rubicon Global collects and analyzes waste and recycling data for businesses and governments worldwide.

<sup>xvii</sup> Statistic is for the years 1961-2016, noting that there are 335 billion tons of glacial ice melting each year according to “Century Marks,” *Christian Century Magazine*, May 8, 2019, p. 9.

<sup>xviii</sup> The Rev. Aisha Brooks-Lytle, Presbytery of Greater Atlanta, writing in *Christian Century Magazine*, May 8, 2019, p. 18.

<sup>xix</sup> Abridged and adapted from *Sing A New Church*, hymn lyrics by Delores Dufner, OSB, Oregon Catholic Press, and sung to “Nettleton,” the melody for “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” I have altered the last line, in the context of the sermon, to make it a communion table, as at Saints Martha & Mary Church we gather in a half circle for communion. I also inserted the word “loving” in front of the word “people,” to correspond to the gospel message of “love others as I have loved you.” The full title of the well-known 18<sup>th</sup> Century negro spiritual is *Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees*, published in various forms in more than 84 hymnal editions worldwide. The original authorship of the lyrics and musical composition is unknown but may have been a kind of password used by slaves to allow entrance into secret, forbidden worship meetings in Virginia. The first published version appeared in *The Journal of American Folklore* (1925). The Journal included spirituals, as well as African American folk tales and proverbs that were collected by students at the Penn School on Saint Helena Island, South Carolina.

<sup>xx</sup> Revelation 21:1-6 and Eugene Peterson's interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:13—“*but for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unwaveringly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.*” Emphasis added.