

THE SECRET OF SATISFACTION

Ted Schroder, January 24, 2010

When the Israelites came out of Egypt they had to pass through the desert, a wilderness which was barren and had little pasturage. They complained to Moses about their lack of provisions. The Lord promised to “rain down bread from heaven.” (Exodus 16:4) Each morning, for forty years in their journey through the wilderness, there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. They called it ‘manna’ which means, ‘what is it?’ It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. When they gathered it up they ground it in a hand-mill or crushed it in a mortar, then cooked it in a pot or made it into cakes. It tasted like something made with olive oil. It is said in the Psalms. “Man did eat angels’ food,” (Ps.78:25), “God satisfied them with the bread of heaven.” (Ps.105:40) This gift of God sustained them for forty years in the wilderness. It stood between the Israelites and starvation. To them it was the Bread of Life.

Jesus drew upon this history when he fed the five thousand with five loaves and two small fish. People started to follow him because they ate the loaves and were looking to him to fill their bellies, to meet their physical needs. He told them, “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you...I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world... I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:27,32-35)

What does that mean? What does it mean to never go hungry or never be thirsty? Surely he is not talking about satisfying our physical appetites? We know that he didn't. Yet so much of life is taken up with feeding ourselves, and fulfilling our physical needs. For many people in poverty, that is what they most desire. Yet when we have eaten and had our fill we find ourselves still dissatisfied. That was my experience.

I was born and raised in a county town of 3,000 people. My parents owned and ran one of the local hotels. Our family lived in a suite in the hotel. We lived literally above the store. My parents, my sister and I, ate in the hotel restaurant. I ordered all my meals off the menu. I lived a very privileged life, in a material sense. I grew up knowing a wide variety of people, from laborers, blacksmiths who worked on the gold dredges, tradesmen of various sorts, lumber workers, butchers, bakers, automobile mechanics, aeronautical engineers, local merchants, dairy, sheep and cattle farmers. Professional people such as school-teachers, clergy, accountants, lawyers and doctors were also customers. Salesmen, company representatives, government inspectors and officials, and tourists were guests in the hotel. Seasonally there were horse racing people: owners, trainers and jockeys. There were also rugby football teams and their supporters. When the circus or other entertainments came to town, their show people would stay with us. It was an exciting life. But it was not satisfying.

I saw this colorful cavalcade of characters pass by with all their aspirations, and disappointments, all their expectations and frustrations, all their hopes and dreams, all their sorrows and sadness. Many would drown those sorrows in the bars. They would win and lose their money gambling on anything that moved. Many oozed cynicism, and made fun of God, and the things of the Spirit. The Chief Psychiatrist of the local mental hospital had been raised by his clergy father in the church, but he had long ago rejected all that inheritance. This

man, who was charged with the care of the emotionally disturbed, found his solace in Dewar's White Label, or Johnnie Walker's Red Label whisky. His drinking companions were our local doctors, a dedicated husband and wife team. From time to time he was hospitalized for alcoholism. He eventually died of cirrhosis of the liver. They were my parents' friends, and customers, and their lives were continually before me. They did not inspire me to emulate them. Their lives seemed so dissatisfying, so devoid of meaning and purpose. The words of Ecclesiastes rang in my ears, "Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 2:11)

To get away from the busyness of the hotel, where we all worked seven days a week at any task that was needed to serve the public, I would drive up to the headwaters of the river, in a gorge, some twenty miles away. It is described as one of the beautiful places in New Zealand with turquoise blue water pools backed by cliffs and native forest. There I would meditate on Psalm 63 – "O God you are my God earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.....My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods."

True satisfaction, I had found, came not from the food that spoils, but the food that endures to eternal life. In the midst of a commercial life, I had discovered the Bread of Life. I had found that what St. Augustine had prayed was true: "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in You." The world in which I lived was a spiritual wilderness. There was no lasting satisfaction to be found in the eating, drinking and entertainment that consumed the life of those around me. Instead I found my soul fed by the manna from heaven. I found a life that was eternal - more than temporal and mortal.

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven, if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John 6:47-51)

When we eat bread we are physically strengthened. When we receive Christ by faith into our lives we are strengthened by the Spirit of God. As the bread becomes part of our body, in the mysterious process of metabolism, so, by the working of the Holy Spirit, Christ becomes one with our spirit. This results in a hunger for heavenly things, and a distaste for what is not beautiful, true or good. As bread satisfies the hunger of the body, this indwelling of Christ in us satisfies the hunger of the soul.

To remind us of this necessity Jesus instituted his Supper, so that his disciples should meet and eat the bread of heaven and drink the cup of salvation. By so doing we commemorate his body broken for us and his blood shed for us, to satisfy the hunger of our spirit and the thirst of our hearts. By this means he draws near to us, and nourishes us with his love. Just as we physically take and eat and drink of the elements of Holy Communion, we are invited to receive Christ, and what he has done for us on the Cross, by faith. When we do so, we find the life that satisfies, life in all its fullness, life that is eternal.

Once having tasted this heavenly food, all other food pales in comparison. It is so superior that you never want to eat the food that spoils again. "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare." (Isaiah 55:2) This is the secret of satisfaction.

Follow my blog on www.ameliachapel.com/blog/