

“Healthy Feeding”

Last fall, I realized my sleep habits were keeping me awake most nights. In addition I was having some tension in my chest. No need to be alarmed, I am ok. But it was a wake-up call for me. Stereotypically of most men, I don't visit the doctor unless I am really sick. I find all kinds of excuses to not visit the doctor. After about two weeks of not sleeping well and the pains continuing, I went to the doctor. After some discussion the doctor and I came to the conclusion that I was probably in no serious danger, but to be on the safe side, he sent me to a cardiologist. Another reason I hate doctors; one sends you to another, then to another, then to another. My appointment with the cardiologist was uneventful, the first time. Yep, like the specialist he is, “Jim, I don't think you are in any serious danger, but I want you to come back for a stress test and let's do some blood work too. Then we will have a baseline for your care.” So I made the appointment. Who in their right mind would have a stress test two days before Christmas! Well, that was the earliest appointment, so I took it. I waited for five weeks. Good thing, nothing serious was wrong!

On the day of the test, I arrived ready to walk the treadmill. This was the first time I had one of these tests. The nurse and doctor explained the process. I started walking. The treadmill rose. I continued to walk. The treadmill rose. I continued to walk. Of course they were taking my blood pressure and pulse at specific intervals. After about half an hour, I finished the test. The cardiologist announced I was fit! I could do any exercise I wanted! No signs of heart problems. Oh by the way, did you ever have your blood work done? To the first floor I went, confident that all was fine. The blood was drawn and I was on my way.

Christmas Eve afternoon I received a call from my cardiologist. “Mr. Goodyear?” Yes, you might have done well with your stress test, but your blood work indicates something else of concern. Your cholesterol level is way above normal. You need to watch what you eat...no red meats, no dairy products, no pasta...the list went on. WHAT, here I am in the midst of the Christmas season with lots of cookies, cakes, and pasta – that is a quick meal for me a couple times a week. Looks like I had a new years resolution without thinking about it. Shortly after the new year, I met with my family doctor for more bad news. Not only was my cholesterol level high, but I am pre-diabetic. Since my father, one of my brothers and my grandmother are all diabetic, he stressed the importance of taking care of my body. Jim, you need to loose twenty-five pounds...in six months! Instead of eating, I was now looking for healthy feeding of my body.

Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians that “knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; but anyone who loves God is known by him.” Sure, I have the knowledge of what it takes to care for my

body; fruits & vegetables, low carbohydrates and regular exercise; but knowing and doing are two different things. Looks like knowing what to eat puffed me up an extra twenty-five pounds! Since I love myself and want to take care of myself; I need to turn that knowledge into a useful tool. Paul also writes that our body is a temple for God. Caring for our bodies, is caring for God. How we care for our body reflects how we care for one of God's gifts to us. In verse eight of today's Corinthian text, we hear "Food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak."

Not only is Paul referring to the physical foods we ingest, but he is also talking about spiritual food for the soul. The "knowledge-puffs up" issue was a huge problem in Corinth. These gifted and knowledgeable Christians knew it and didn't hesitate to let their Christian brothers and sisters who were struggling with some moral and ethical issues, know it. They were puffed up, snobby, stuffy and smug Christians. Maybe you know some smug Christians; people who live like the Jones' next door; having the material things like their neighbor but don't really need it, after a status symbol. Worried about how someone is dressed than finding out the person lost all their belongings in a fire; or appalled at the acolyte wearing sneakers. What about the person with the brightly dyed hair and visible piercings. Christians let their sinful nature take over by using their faith beliefs to make others believe what is right or wrong rather than encouraging the others in their relationship with Jesus. It is easier to judge in one way or another than to live in the grayness of a persons life – getting to know someone through love.

What Paul is trying to tell us is that while all things might be lawful, our respect and love for each other may in some cases limit our freedom. Later in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, "All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful, but not all things build up, do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other." Communities of faith need to become an 'it depends' community with integrity. It's not the choices we make, but what the choice does – does it alienate the church from Christ? Living in the grayness of life challenges us to determine if the choice we make lifts the body of Christ or harms it. Our own knowledge gets in the way of healthy feeding for the other person. How often do our words and actions signal a means of tearing down? How does our feeding of the other person affect the body of Christ?

A holy man was having a conversation with the Lord one day and said, "Lord, I would like to know what heaven and hell are like." The Lord led the holy man to two doors. He opened one of the doors and the holy man looked in. In the middle of the room was a large round table. In the middle of the table was a large pot of stew, which smelled delicious and made the holy man's mouth water. The people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles that were strapped to their arms, and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful. But because the handles were longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths. The holy man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering. The

Lord said, “You have seen hell.” They went to the next room and opened the door. It was exactly the same as the first one. There was the large round table with the large pot of stew which made the holy man’s mouth water. The people were equipped with the same long-handled spoons, but here the people were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking. The holy man said, “I don’t understand.” “It is simple,” said the Lord. “It requires but one skill. You see they have learned to feed each other, while the greedy think only of themselves.”

This is the problem Paul addresses in our text for today. The early Corinthians were trying to feed themselves with long-handled spoons inlaid with pride and knowledge. Paul has an important suggestion: Why not try feeding each other, and while you’re at it, season the food with love. We hear it is better to give than to receive. Giving of oneself is the greatest gift you can give to someone. Sure, we all like to receive too. And when someone else shows love, we feel good about ourselves and the other person. In relationships, there is a give and take. Each person needs to receive in ways that lift them up and they must give to the other person to make the relationship meaningful. Taking care of yourself, body and soul, is vital to helping others. Before you can help others, you need to care for your own body and soul. Knowledge, even if the truth, comes to nothing, and even results in the loss of a brother or sister, if it is not applied with love and joined with the act of yielding one’s rights to the weakness of another.

Feeding others is something we do all the time. Whether it is food for the body or food for the soul, others are fed. Is what you feed healthy, does the other person know your love for them is the same love we share in Jesus Christ? Are you being fed with a healthy dose of love? In relationship with Jesus Christ, we are loved in spite of our differences, including our greediness. God loves us and continues to feed us daily. In the knowledge of Jesus, make choices that feed each other with love. Feed each other with a healthy portion.