

August 11, 2024 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

Stay on God's Diet

Spiritual food

Free food

Are you on a diet? I don't mean to insult you. It would not be surprising if you were on a diet. I read that about 50% of Americans were on a diet or were going to start one soon. 67% of Americans said they would like to lose 10 pounds or more. If you want to go on a diet, you've certainly got your choice. The Atkins Diet, the South-Beach Diet, the Blood Type Diet, the Vegetarian Diet and others used to be popular. Now, you hear a lot about the Mediterranean Diet, Intermittent fasting, Vegan Diet, Keto Diet and others. This morning, though, we are reminded that the best diet of all, the diet we all need to be on at all the time is God's Diet.

Spiritual food

God's Diet is all about spiritual food for your soul. A lot of people who were following Jesus in John 6 did not understand what it meant to be on God's Diet. They were only concerned about food for their stomachs, not for their souls. Just the day before Jesus gave them food for their stomachs. With only five small loaves of bread and two small fish, Jesus fed a crowd of over 5000 men. Jesus did that on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. After the meal, Jesus sent his disciples back across the lake and stayed behind to pray. During the night, while the people were sleeping, Jesus walked on the water and caught up with his disciples. When the crowds finally made it back to the western shore the next day, they were surprised that Jesus was already there. They knew that Jesus did not leave with his disciples so how did he get on the western shore before they did? They asked (:25), "**Rabbi, when did you get here?**"

Jesus dismissed their question. He knew that wasn't what they really cared about. They only wanted another free meal. He replied (:26), "**Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed [which proved that true God, your Savior] but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.**" He let them know that spiritual food for their souls was more important than food for their stomachs. He said (:27), "**Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.**"

The people did not yet understand what Jesus was saying. If Jesus could feed a crowd of thousands with a little fish and bread, they hoped he would be some sort of miraculous welfare program. No need to plant their fields and harvest and work hard. Whenever they were hungry, they could just go to

Jesus and get free food. When Jesus told them again that God's diet meant believing in him as true God their Savior, they were not very excited. They tried to dismiss Jesus as unimportant. Sure, he had given them a free meal, but in their minds, Moses was even greater. He gave them manna, free bread that appeared on the ground every morning, for 40 years for nearly 2 million people while they traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land of Canaan. Jesus, however, explained that Moses did not give the manna. He was just a prophet. The manna was a gift from God to care for his people. Through that manna, God was teaching his people to trust in him. It was all about faith. Likewise, Jesus fed the crowd because they were hungry and he wanted to help. But he especially wanted them to look to him for "food" that would last forever.

The day after the Feeding of the 5000 was just like the morning after Thanksgiving. They were hungry again and they expected Jesus to give them more bread and fish. But Jesus did not perform another miracle to feed them. He did not report the miracle because he came to feed more than an empty belly. He came to feed our hungry souls, our starving hearts, our guilty conscience, our deficient self-esteem. He came to address the lack of nourishment we get from our relationships, our jobs, our friends, and our family. Jesus wanted the crowd to realize that they needed the good news of salvation, so they would never be spiritually hungry and would live forever in heaven. God's diet was about spiritual food, but the people still did not understand. They thought that Jesus was talking about some magical food that you could eat once and then live forever, like some sort of Fountain of Youth. How could they be so dense?

How can we be so dense? If you could look at the faces of the people in that crowd, you would see your own face, and mine, and every one of our faces. We also are more interested in physical things than spiritual things. It's true. If we fed our souls as well as we fed our bodies, we would all be doctors of theology. If we fed our bodies as well as we fed our souls, we would probably die of malnourishment. Think of it. When do we pray the most? When we need or want something physical. Most of our prayers are for earthly things. We get more worried and upset about earthly things than spiritual things. If it seems that we are going to miss a meal, we get upset. But it does not bother us so much if we do not spend a day or two or three reading a devotion or praying, or if we don't get to church?

It is not wrong to be concerned about physical things. Making sure we eat is just common sense. Jesus even told us to pray for daily bread. But that is only one of seven petitions in the Lord's Prayer. The other six petitions deal with spiritual matters. Yes, your Lord wants you to take care of your body and eat properly. Yes, he wants you to work hard to provide for yourself and

your family. But the body is just a clay pot that holds your soul. The soul is most important. As mortals who are always thinking about our bodies and how we feel and what we want. It's not surprising that we stay more focused on the physical things of life. If we asked a little child what he would like to eat, he would probably say that he would like pizza with ice cream and cake for every meal. But parents know what is best and give their children fruit and vegetables. If Jesus asked us what we wanted from him, our natural inclination would be to list lots of money and free food from and a wonderful house with no mortgage and a new car and perfect health. Lord, forgive us for our mixed-up priorities! In love, Jesus gives us what we need the most. He gives us salvation. He gives us spiritual food.

This spiritual food was not easy to get. Jesus could not just make it appear like he made loaves and fish appear. The price for salvation required him to live a perfect life and then let you take credit for it. He welcomed cheats and sinners as if they were his best friends. He was kind and patient when nobody understood him or was there to help him. He lived a life of perfect love, always concerned for others no matter how sinful they were. He lived the life that you and I as Christians wish we could live but we can't. We sin. And since we are not perfect, Jesus let them force him to a hill outside Jerusalem where he was punished for the sins of the whole world. He cried out, "Father, forgive them," when his enemies were sitting on his chest pounding nails into him. He looked tenderly into the eyes of a thief who deserved nothing but punishment and handed over the keys to his own kingdom. He did the same for you. He gave you the spiritual diet of salvation.

Even though the Jews did not get his spiritual emphasis, Jesus kept explaining and explaining as we will see for the next two Sundays. He did not walk away in an angry huff. He did not give up. And he does not give up on us either. He keeps coming to us with the great good news of his love. Through Word and Sacrament he feeds you God's diet – the satisfaction of a perfect status with God, a rich portion of forgiveness, the sweet dessert of life after death. The Lord gives us the spiritual food we need to live forever in heaven.

Free food

Notice, I said that God GIVES us spiritual food. He does not sell it to us. He does not make us earn it. He GIVES us the spiritual food we need for free. The earthly minded crowd was still focused on getting food for their bellies, food that would let them live forever without dying. They wondered (:28), "**What must we do to do the works God requires?**" Jesus, however, explained (:29), "**The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.**" It's not just that God gives you salvation for free. He even gives you faith to believe it. Believing is not something we do, but something that God does to us. Believing in Jesus is a work that God does inside your heart. Our selfish

ego would like to take some credit for being a believer. It is so easy to think that we are believers because we are generally morally good people who come to church, or that we made smart decisions, or that we did not resist the Holy Spirit when he knocked on the door of our hearts. It is so easy to think that we are going to go to heaven because we are better than other people we can point to, ignoring the fact that we are all sinful and deserve nothing but punishment.

Do you remember that children's story about the dog who was walking home from the butcher shop with a big bone in his mouth? He was so happy to have that bone. As he walked home, though, he looked into a pond and saw his reflection. He thought he was looking at another dog who had a really nice bone too. He became greedy. He dropped the bone in his mouth and dove after the other dog's bone. But it was just his reflection. He got all wet and he lost his bone. If we think that we are believers who are going to heaven because of anything we did or thought or decided, then we are like that dog with the bone. If we are not trusting in God alone for everything, including faith itself, then we are trusting in ourselves and we are doomed. Then we would never know if we were sincere enough or morally good enough. We would not ever be sure if we are saved. We would not have the comfort and confidence of salvation. How great it is to know that God's diet is for free. Salvation does not depend on us. Salvation depends on God and you can always trust in him. You have already been saved. The pressure and worry is gone. It's already done. Rejoice.

Are you on a diet? Yes, you are. You are on God's diet. You are being fed salvation. Just like you make sure to feed your body regularly, make sure to feed your soul. Stay focused on spiritual matters. Make church attendance and Bible time an automatic part of your life. Bring your children to church and Sunday School. Take advantage of every opportunity you have for a Christian education. If you had a gift certificate to a fancy restaurant in town, it would be foolish not to enjoy it. If a gourmet chef personally delivered a wonderful meal to your table each night, you would certainly enjoy it. Jesus is giving you something even greater – salvation. Stay on God's diet and be saved. Amen.