

Panther Valley Ecumenical Church

October 12, 2016 Food & Faith: gathering at the table to talk
about what brings us together.

"Giving Thanks"

Food for thought:

O LORD, what a variety of things you have made! In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of your creatures. Here is the ocean, vast and wide, teeming with life of every kind, both large and small. See the ships sailing along, and Leviathan, which you made to play in the sea.

They all depend on you to give them food as they need it. When you supply it, they gather it.

You open your hand to feed them, and they are richly satisfied. But if you turn away from them, they panic. When you take away their breath, they die and turn again to dust. When you give them your breath, life is created, and you renew the face of the earth.

~Psalm 104:24-30 from the New Living Translation

Onions By William Matthews ¹

How easily happiness begins by dicing onions. A lump of sweet butter slithers and swirls across the floor of the sauté pan, especially if its errant path crosses a tiny slick of olive oil. Then a tumble of onions.

This could mean soup or risotto or chutney (from the Sanskrit *chatni*, to lick). Slowly the onions go limp and then nacreous and then what cookbooks call clear, though if they were eyes you could see

clearly the cataracts in them. It's true it can make you weep to peel them, to unfurl and to tease from the taut ball first the brittle, caramel-colored and decrepit papery outside layer, the least

recent the reticent onion wrapped around its growing body, for there's nothing to an onion but skin, and it's true you can go on weeping as you go on in, through the moist middle skins, the sweetest

and thickest, and you can go on in to the core, to the bud-like, acrid, fibrous skins densely clustered there, stalky and incomplete, and these are the most pungent, like the nuggets of nightmare

and rage and murmury animal comfort that infant humans secrete. This is the best domestic perfume. You sit down to eat with a rumor of onions still on your twice-washed hands and lift to your mouth a hint

of a story about loam and usual endurance. It's there when you clean up and rinse the wine glasses and make a joke, and you leave the minutest whiff of it on the light switch, later, when you climb the stairs.

¹ William Matthews, "Onions" from Selected Poems and Translations, 1969-1991. Copyright © 1992 by William Matthews. Reprinted with the permission of Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved, www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com.

Source: Selected Poems and Translations 1969-1991 (1992)

Questions to chew on:

Q – How would you describe your relationship with food?

Q – How do you say grace? How has your practice of thanksgiving changed over time?

Q – What does it look or feel like to make yourself worthy of eating (receiving) the life and death of another?

Q - If you were to intentionally make a home cooked meal for people you love – Who would you invite? What are the stories behind that meal? What stories would you tell?

Read Mary Olivers poem “Beans”

When we think of Virtue – we think of goodness, righteousness, and morality

But do we think of beans?

In the book of Genesis we read that on the third day: 11 *Then God said, “Let the land sprout with vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.” And that is what happened.* 12 *The land produced vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.*

And on the 6th day:

29 *Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food.* 30 *And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened.*

31 *Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!*

“To eat is to be implicated in a vast, complex, interweaving set of life and death dramas in which we are only one character among many. No matter how solitary our eating experience may be, every sniff, chomp, and swallow connects us to vast global trade networks and thus to biophysical and social worlds far beyond ourselves. The moment we chew on anything we participate in regional, geographic histories and in biochemical processes that, for all their diversity and complexity, defy our wildest imagination and most thorough attempts at comprehension. The minute we contemplate or talk about eating, we show ourselves to be involved in culinary traditions and cultural taboos, as well as moral quandaries and spiritual quests. ...

Food is about relationships that join us to earth, fellow creatures, loved ones, and guest, and ultimately God. How we eat testifies to whether we value the creatures we live with and depend upon. To eat is to savor and struggle with the mystery of creaturliness. When our eating is mindful we celebrate the goodness of fields, gardens, forests, and watersheds, and the skill of those who can nurture seed and animal life into delicious food. We acknowledge and honor God as the giver of every good and perfect gift. But we also learn to correct our own arrogance, boredom, and ingratitude. Eating invites people to develop a greater appreciation for where they are and who they are with, so that their eating can be sacramental rather than a sacrilegious act. A thoughtful, theological relation to food makes possible the discovery that eating is among the most intimate and

pleasing ways possible for us to enter into the memberships of creation and find there the God who daily blesses and feeds life.” (4)

“Theologically understood food is not reducible to material stuff. It is the provision and nurture of God made pleasing and delectable. It is the daily reminder that life and death come to us as gifts.” (7)

For you to eat, others have to die.....

“all life becomes a sign and sacrament of God’s love, a witness to the costliness and mystery of life and death, and so becomes the inspiration to greater attention and care.” (158)

It is no accident that the great religious and philosophical traditions have thought deeply about what it means to receive the world.

For Buddhists, Hindus, and Jains, Ahimsa is central – “Ahimsa, (Sanskrit: “noninjury”) in the Indian religions of Jainism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, the ethical principle of not causing harm to other living things.” Most are vegetarians for this reason.

Jewish people follow the Torah that tells them how to and what they can eat. They take seriously Shabbat and Jubilee. Today is Yom Kippur, the day of atonement – a day of fasting for the faithful Jewish people a day when Jubilee is declared - where they can experience God’s forgiveness, hope in God’s promises, and practice God’s justice.

For Christians the cross, resurrection, and the eucharist are central. We understand Jesus death on the cross as a giving away of himself for others, His resurrection as re-birth of a new creation, and at the table we “eat Jesus”. At the table we receive the gift of Jesus life, death and resurrection. We receive nourishment and give thanks for our journey.....

These traditions point to the foundational truth that we receive the world. Each of these traditions understand life as a gift...

food is one of the five essential ingredients for life. (oxygen, water, shelter, and sleep)

We are the first generation that does not understand what it means to receive food....

We can purchase and grab the world but at a fundamental level we receive the world.

When we think of food as a commodity we think of the following: is the food cheap, convenient, is it in big supply. This way of thinking is doing a lot of damage, abuses animals, destroys the soil, supports systems that separate rich and poor.

Life and food are precious gift

Eating is not fuel or a mechanical act

It is an act of intimacy – when you take a bite you bite into the whole world.

Bruschetta as a delectable experience..... are you involved in growing tomatoes and basil?

Soil is a miracle – it is the place where we get all of the fertility

Soil absorbs death and brings forth life – place of hospitality....

Plants are fascinating....they are very intelligent – they converse with the soil and other plants.....

Plants are hungry for a conversation with soil...flavor and health of our food are directly related to the conversation and relationship that happens between a plant and soil.

Cows – 4 quadrant stomach – cows can eat plant fiber and transform it into milk that then makes its way into cheese....

Farmers, truck drivers,

When you reject your Grandmother's food – you reject her love.

We are put into innumerable moral relationships....

“The practice of thanksgiving defines people as creatures who not only ingest and digest their food but relish it as the medium of life and love. When eating is infolded within the language and grammar of grace, and when food itself is experienced as the delectable manifestation of God's communion with creation. When people say grace with their entire being, express it honestly and with considered appreciation for its deep theological and practical significance, they participate, however imperfectly, in the paradise of God. (180)