

FOOD MATTERS
Randall Tremba
October 27, 2013
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

Joel 2:23-32

The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil as before. I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied.

* * *

I was raised on meat and potatoes. My mother served meat and potatoes often, along with macaroni and cheese, fish sticks and tater tots. Tater tots?!

I was raised on meat and potatoes. I still love steak, pork, hamburgers, hotdogs, sausage, bacon, French fries, home fries, mashed potatoes, broiled potatoes, scalloped potatoes and, unfortunately, all kinds of potato chips, especially salt & vinegar. I am an expert on eating but I am not an expert on nutritional eating.

Fortunately, my children were raised on nutritional food thanks to their mother who believes in good food properly prepared. Although I will confess that when they were young and we were on long road trips and short on money we stopped more than a few times beneath the golden arches.

(May God have mercy on my soul.)

Many of us have made unhealthy choices along the way. But there is hope. Salvation is within reach. People can repent. People can turn their lives around. People and nations can repent. We don't have to stick in our ruts of ignorance and self-righteous ways, those ingrained habits that pull us in wrong directions.

We can repent. We can open our hearts and minds to mercy and truth. We can change and make amends if we are humble and admit our harmful ways. We can learn and practice better habits.

But old ruts are often deep ruts.

Last summer Paula and I took our 4-year-old twin granddaughters on a two-day excursion to the Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. On our second night there we failed to get reservations at a restaurant. So I said to Paula: *I guess we'll have to go to McDonald's.* The word "McDonald's" was barely out of my mouth when both girls simultaneously screamed: NO. NOT MCDONALD'S. YUCK. YUCK. YUCK.

And therein lies the hope for America.

Therein lies the road to salvation, to better health, less obesity, less diabetes, less strokes and fewer coronary bypasses. For who can doubt that the dramatic increase in all manner of bodily diseases over the past 60 years is not somehow related to the dramatic change in the American diet fueled by and manipulated by the crass and cynical marketing of junk food, fast food, and highly processed foods to children who grow into sickly adults.

The American diet and farm policies have become an abomination unto the Lord who filled the earth with good food—grains, fruits and vegetables in abundance. *For every human being on the planet the world produces two pounds of grain per day— roughly 3,000 calories, and that's without even counting all the beans, potatoes, nuts, fruits, and vegetables we eat.* (Frances Moore Lappé, *Diet for a Small Planet*).

Something has gone badly wrong.

The Creator has filled the earth with good food—grains, fruits and vegetables in abundance. But we have turned those good and wholesome gifts into insipid commodities and filled our bellies with more and more sodas and sugar laced foods. It's an epidemic. It's killing us by the tens of thousands. And we can't blame this on terrorists unless we broaden the definition of "terrorism" to include those who *slowly poison a nation to death legally*.

Pills alone won't stop this epidemic—although the pharmaceutical industry would like you to think so. Pills alone won't fix it. And surgery alone won't either. It will require a radical change in eating habits and a bold, organized public challenge to the increasing monopolization of food by a few corporations who, blinded by quick profits, have lost touch with the soil, disrespect the lives of animals, and disregard our nation's health and well-being.

This past week I've been reading *Foodopoly* by Wenonah Hauter. *Foodopoly*. It's an eye opener. Did you know that the organic food movement has been swallowed nearly whole by gigantic corporations who fudge standards and labels to deceive the unaware? Beware of industrial farming.

One morning, forty years ago, I stood in the lettuce fields of So. California with Caesar Chavez, president of the United Farmer Workers. I remember Mr. Chavez making a telling prediction due to the increasing replacement of field workers by more and more machinery. Given the right breed of tomatoes a machine might pick them someday, he said. *Someday grocery stores won't be able to sell bruised tomatoes but they will be able to sell tasteless ones*. And he could have said the same about apples.

Once upon a time in ancient Israel a swarm of locust devoured crops and caused a near famine in the land. Yes, locusts do that. Locusts are not driven by compassion. Nature has a bloody tooth and a voracious appetite. You see, we live on and live off of a wildly beautiful yet terrifying planet. This is no Disney World. This is the real, living thing.

After seeing the movie *Gravity* last week I have a new appreciation for spaceship earth. We can't live for long anywhere else. THIS IS IT. PERIOD.

Yes, locust, beetles and sting bugs are nasty. Nature can do some nasty things. But it's mild compared to what we in our so-called wisdom are doing to ourselves. Only fools and depraved souls would destroy the only home we have—would destroy the River of Life and Tree of Life—solely for the sake of bloody profits.

According to the lesson for today, the locust came in swarms and destroyed the crops—not unlike certain farm to market policies that are destroying the fields and crops of this land.

Once upon a time the locust destroyed the fields of plenty and our great ancestors nearly died for lack of food. But then something happened. The LORD, which is to say, the Spirit of Life, the Spirit of the Earth arose with a promise of hope and healing. The prophet Joel heard it.

O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the LORD your God who has poured down for you abundant rain as before. The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter.

You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied. My people shall never again be put to shame. I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old shall dream dreams, and your young shall see visions. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. (Joel 2:23-32)

Like a swarm of locust certain policies and practices in this nation are devouring our

land. But more and more people are seeing a vision of how life might be again. People are waking up to an inconvenient truth. Food matters. *The food we eat can be the safest and most powerful form of medicine or it can be the slowest form of poison.* (Ann Wigmore)

No, not McDonald's, cried my 4-year -old granddaughters!

And therein lies hope. Parents can teach children a better way. Maybe, just maybe, the younger generations will eat better, more nutritionally, more ethically than most of us have eaten over the past 60 years. Maybe, just maybe, the killing fields will become healing fields.

This past week I watched a documentary entitled *Forks Over Knives* featuring the discoveries of medical doctor Caldwell Esselstyn and nutritional biochemist Colin Campbell. Over a long period of time, their research has shown the healing power of a proper diet—a diet that most people through time have unconsciously practiced but which our culture has virtually forsaken.

According to these two field-tested researchers, a whole food, plant-based diet can not only prevent most of what ails us but can also reverse many of the degenerative effects of existing diseases. And that means we won't need a bucket full of pills or surgical knives to slice and splice our vessels. Forks over knives. A proper diet may help us avoid the surgical coronary knife.

I'm no expert on nutrition or farm to market policies. But I am trying to get educated and to catch up with our own Marian Buckner, Barbara Hartman, John Gonano, Dee Taylor and others in our congregation who have devoted their hearts and minds to bringing America back to healthy and wise food production and to a good and healthy diet.

Those who honor the "name" of the LORD (which is to say, the "way" of the Maker of heaven and earth) shall be saved, shall be well. For if you happen to know what "salvation" actually means, good health and good farming methods are a form of salvation for people and this earth we call home.