

A WHOLESOME TABLE
Randall Tremba
April 17, 2016
Fourth Sunday in Eastertide
(Good Shepherd Sunday)
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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PSALM 23
Bobby McFerrin
(Dedicated to my mother)

The Lord is my Shepherd. I have all I need,
She makes me lie down in green meadows,
beside the still waters She will lead.
She restores my soul,
She rights my wrongs,
She leads me in the path of good things,
And fills my heart with songs.
Even though I walk,
through a dark and dreary land,
There is nothing that can shake me,
She has said she won't forsake me,
I'm in her hand.
She sets a table before me in the presence of my foes.
She anoints my head with oil, my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and kindness
will follow me
All the days of my life,
And I will live in her house,
Forever, forever, and ever.

The New Testament lesson for today is from Acts of the Apostles (9:36-43). It's a story about Peter, the so-called first shepherd of the church. In this lesson, Peter raised a dead woman back to life, which only goes to show that the goal of the Christian faith is not to escape our bodies or this world for another. It is to live this life to the hilt, to live long and well, here and now.

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In September of 1973, 43 years ago, I was ordained by the Los Ranchos Presbytery of So. California. At my ordination I was charged to be a faithful pastor. I was reminded that a pastor is a like a shepherd responsible to nourish his or her flock and to protect it from predators.

And so for the past 40 years I've tried to bring us to green pastures and beside still waters, to bring comfort, and to protect us from toxins, like racism, homophobia, Islamophobia and from bad religion, including bad forms of Christianity.

You anoint my head with oil. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemy.

This past week I read Psalm 23 in the light of what I've been learning about nutrition, not *metaphoric* food, but our actual American diet, which, as it turns out, is slowly killing us.

Now I am no paragon of healthy eating. I still crave the occasional Big Mac, plus fish and chips washed down by a Guinness, which, if you can believe the Irish, is as good as milk for your health. I may not always practice what I preach but I'm still obligated to teach good and healthy practices. And that includes the practice of eating.

I was blessed to have a mother who prepared a wholesome table. She fed her family from a garden of tomatoes, beans, lettuce, radishes, onions and corn. She believed in eating lots of vegetables and fruit. But she eventually succumbed, at least a little, to the convenience of processed foods.

And so we occasionally ate fish sticks and tater tots. She also believed the government's food pyramid, little knowing it was influenced by the Big Agriculture, Big Beef, and Big Dairy industries. So we ate lots of meat and eggs and drank lots of milk to make our bones strong. *Milk is good for every body and you can't get protein without meat*, she was told.

But we've now learned that ain't so. The food industry like the tobacco industry has hoisted bad and deadly information upon us. We are wising up, but addictions are hard to break.

My wife Paula sets a table even more wholesome than my mother. But on road trips with our children—I'm ashamed to admit—we frequently stopped at the Golden Arches.

A couple years ago we were on a road trip with our New Mexico granddaughters who were about 4 years old at the time. We nonchalantly pulled into a McDonald's. At the site of the Golden Arches both screamed at once. NO. NOT MCDONALDS. YUCK. IT'S POISON.

That's what I call progress.

Yes, we are learning to eat better. But addictions are hard to break. As Rebecca Starr put it in her blog, "Lessons from the Garden for Passover": the Jews were once enslaved by Pharaoh; now Jews and many others are enslaved by Big Ag and Big Pharma. *Got a health problem? We've got a pill to fix you.*

Everybody's working to cure cancer, heart disease and diabetes; next to nobody's working to prevent them.

Lately I've been feasting on books about nutrition. One is entitled *Whole: Rethinking the Science of Nutrition* by Colin Campbell; another is *Healthy Eating, Healthy World: Unleashing the Power of Plant-Based Nutrition* by J. Morris Hicks.

Last year I read *Foodopoly* by Wenonah Hauter. I also watched the documentary *Food, Inc.* and the film *Forks Over Knives*, which makes the case that if we put healthier food on our forks, we wouldn't have to go under the knife for heart and artery repairs nearly as much if at all.

A friend of mine who suffered with high blood pressure and signs of heart disease switched to a whole-food, plant-based diet three years ago and now is off a dozen medications and down 30 pounds. I've also heard of diabetics who reversed and eliminated their condition on such a nutritional plan.

As it turns out, we'd all be healthier on a whole-food, plant-based diet. As my mother often said: *What God provides from the earth will always be better for you than what comes out of a factory.* And, she added, *it will usually cost less.* By which she meant financially, but it could also mean the cost to our health.

The sudden increase in cancer, diabetes, heart disease and obesity since WWII is no fluke. It can easily be traced to a radical change in the American diet. The increase in air

pollution and global warming can also be traced to the destruction of more and more forest land to raise more and more grain to fatten more and more cattle.

I'm not advocating meat-free diets, but it's worth considering how such consumer demand has brought about chicken and cattle factories in which animals never see the light of day. And that's not all. From what I've been hearing, the single greatest way to reduce toxic gases in the atmosphere, far greater than eliminating automobiles, would be for Americans to become vegetarians. I'm not ready for that myself. But it's worth considering.

Today is "Good Shepherd Sunday." It's a good time to remember the importance of a wholesome table.