

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Did you happen to read any of the news articles this last week about the teenager in the United Kingdom who went deaf and blind due to his junk food diet? Here are some of the details from one of the many articles

(<https://www.foxnews.com/food-drink/teen-junk-food-diet-blind>):

The case involves a teen, believed to be the UK's first such case, who slowly lost his eyesight and hearing after years of eating nothing but fries, chips, and other kinds of junk food ... The then 14-year-old boy, described as a "fussy eater," complained of experiencing tiredness to his family doctor. By the age of 15, however, his hearing and vision became impaired ... At 17, he was declared legally blind ... The teen was eventually diagnosed with nutritional optic neuropathy, a result of nutritional deficiencies ... The boy's mother told the Telegraph that the teen's condition has "devastated his life" and that he's since dropped out of college. She also left her job in order to care for him.

This case serves as a cautionary tale to all. There can be big consequences linked to diet. What we eat has an effect. There is the old expression: **You Are What You Eat**. Of course, we are not literally what we eat, but the food one eats has a bearing on one's state of mind and health. The proverbial saying takes us to this idea: to be fit and healthy you need to eat good food.

There is a spiritual side to eating. For those of you who have been around the Lutheran church for a while you know what the pastor prays in the older liturgy at the end of one of the services:

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy Holy Word we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ ...

Inwardly digest the Word of God! It might seem like a strange way of saying it until you really dive into the Scriptures. The concept of eating the Word isn't something that was made up in the liturgy. We find it in the Bible, in a lot of places.

In the garden there is an eating that leads to death and there is an eating that is connected to the promise of life. At the Last Supper, there is the promise of the New Covenant - an eating and drinking that gives the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. We are reminded of this in our epistle lesson. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Indeed! It is the death of sin

as we are given the very body and blood of Jesus, and through the offered body and shed blood of Christ we are given the medicine of immortality.

Both the prophet Ezekiel and the apostle John are commanded to eat a scroll that is the Word of God, which turns out to be sweet in their mouths but sour in their stomachs. What they eat becomes what they speak. And the prophet Jeremiah writes: "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts. I did not sit in the company of revelers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because your hand was upon me, for you had filled me with indignation (Jeremiah 15:16-17)." For Jeremiah, the Word of God was simultaneously sweet joy and sour isolation. He was refreshed by the gospel - a joy and delight to the heart - but he was filled with indignation toward all who might be opposed to it.

In our Gospel lesson for this morning we read these words, "Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, *and his food was locusts and wild honey.*" Eating locusts was permitted by the Bible and honey is mentioned in a number of places. Locusts are frequently associated with the wrath of God, as we see in the book of Joel, and a call to sorrow over sin and a reminder of the day of the Lord. Honey is often understood as a listening to and embracing of God's salvation, as we see in Psalm 81:16 where Asaph writes: "But he would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you." The locusts and honey that John the Baptist eats is what he also speaks. He speaks to the crowds of the wrath of God and the good news of Jesus. "Repent and believe" is the message. **You Are What You Eat.** He who eats locusts and honey speaks locusts and honey.

In the *Sermon on the Mount* Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled (Matthew 5:6)." Righteousness is found only in the life, sufferings, and death of Jesus. The child of God is hungry and thirsts for what is right in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Satisfaction is found only in him. He fills the spiritual belly with all good things. And, after the feeding of the 5000, Jesus says, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh . . . the words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life (John 6:51, 63b)." We are to eat the words, and to eat the words is to have Christ. This will create and preserve faith just as nutrients shape, mold, and support our body and all our daily activities.

Well, here we are again at another Rally Day. So, spiritually speaking, what is it going to be for you in the coming year? Will it be a wholesome feasting on the Word of God, or a diet of junk food that will cause you to become spiritually blind and unable to hear? Have you ever opened a bag of chips while you were making dinner and ended up

eating them and spoiling your appetite? Spiritual junk food plays the same role in our lives, filling us up without truly satisfying. It's a poor substitute for what is good. And the junk food is readily available isn't it? To quote one author:

Spiritual junk food comprises of the things that we take in, that sometimes provide temporary comfort, but have little to no spiritual value; and once the moment passes, we feel worse than before. Those things are often hidden in entertainment. Many times entertainment serves as a means to distract us from the problems in our lives, escape reality, cure boredom, or make us feel better. The content in entertainment is often high in spiritual sugar, salt, fat, and empty calories. Most people don't like to admit that what they watch, read, or listen to, has an effect on their spiritual welfare. To one who is accustomed to eating junk food, healthy food isn't very appealing. The same is true for one who is accustomed to enjoying spiritual junk food. And the result of a spiritual junk food diet is a diseased soul.

How then should we eat? We eat the Word of God whenever we find ourselves hearing, reading, marking, and digesting the Bible so that it brings us continually to a dying to sin and a rising in forgiveness. We discuss it as we walk along the road, we study with our loved ones at home, when we come to church and take advantage of Bible classes, and when we bring our children to Sunday and Midweek school. And please understand that what we eat and drink we speak to all nations. We are to bear witness to what we have in Jesus. Themes of Rally Day. Really, it is more than just once a year, for these are the themes of our ongoing Christian walk. Everyday, we eat locusts and honey that we may die and rise with Jesus. And what we eat, we also share with those who are in need. We live our identity in Christ all the time as one Lutheran author writes:

God's Word is more than knowledge or information. The living Word is at work in those who believe. The Law does God's "unusual" or "painful" work by convincing us of our sin (Is. 28:21; Ram. 7: 7); and Jesus' Gospel promises "are spirit and life" (John 6:63) ... Let God's living Word keep you in good spiritual health! Receive God's spiritual "treatments" through Christ-centered daily devotions, which HANDLE ACCURATELY His Law and Gospel. Plus, let God's Spirit fill you with eager anticipation to receive sermons, Bible studies, and Holy Communion each Sunday. Through these means, you and your family will receive God's Law and life-giving Gospel. You will be "dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11).

You Are What You Eat. What will it be? Junk food or the food that forever satisfies? Guess the answer will come as each day and week and month goes by. It is my prayer that you will choose the food that lasts forever. As Jesus says, "Do not work for the

food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal (John 6:27)."

Amen.