

"WHAT FEEDS YOUR HEART POSTURE?"

8/16/26 Sermon Notes

First Reading: Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

The prophet calls upon Israel to do justice in view of God's imminent intervention to save. Righteousness and obedience define who belongs to the Israelite community—not race, nationality, or any other category.

Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right, for soon my salvation will come and my deliverance be revealed.

And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath and do not profane it and hold fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel: I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

Matthew 15:[10-20]

Jesus called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?" He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

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SERMON

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that what comes out of our mouths matters more than what we put into them. That what comes out of our mouths reveals our hearts.

The heart is a funny thing.

Have you heard the phrase "heart posture?" It means the inner attitude, hidden motives, and spiritual orientation of your mind and soul.

Jesus is speaking about our heart posture when He says that "evil intentions, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander" come from the heart.

What FEEDS your heart posture?

Let's play a game.

This or That? I will show you two images and you just shout out which one you would prefer.

Muffin OR Unsalted Almonds

Wheatgrass OR Latte

Bacon Cheeseburger OR Tofu

Wheat Biscuit OR Croissant

Potato Chips OR Rice Cakes

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I can tell whose house I'd rather have lunch at. That's all I'll say about that.

The US Department of Agriculture, or USDA, was founded in 1862 when President Abraham Lincoln signed an act of congress. He famously called it "The People's Department." And as early as 1917 the USDA began releasing images to provide dietary advice to the public.

Most of you probably don't remember the first image released in 1917, but you might recall some of the others, some were even used in school textbooks to develop an understanding of a balanced diet.

Last year, the USDA released a new image, and it's not a pyramid, or a plate, anymore, this time it's more of a funnel.

So even though we would rather choose Muffins, Bacon Cheeseburgers, Croissants, and Potato Chips, we know we have to balance. You have a can of soda, you know you need to balance that out with a few glasses of water. How many salads balance out a barbecue brisket sandwich and fries? It's a balance. Some might say it's about moderation.

If we only feed ourselves the high calorie, high carb, high sugar foods, what happens to us? We could gain weight, we could get sick, we could be in pain, we could be...unhealthy.

I want to tell you a story.

A story about Miss Havisham.

Miss Havisham is genuinely wounded. She was abandoned at the altar by the man she loved.

She doesn't simply experience grief.

She **keeps feeding it.**

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She stops the clocks. Keeps wearing her wedding dress. Lives in the decaying remnants of her wedding day. She repeatedly rehearses the betrayal.

Eventually, she decides that other people should suffer as she suffered.

She adopts Estella—a young girl—and essentially makes her into an instrument of revenge.

Her tragedy isn't simply that someone broke her heart.

It's that **she never stopped feeding the brokenness. And the betrayal and resentment she endured come out as manipulation, bitterness, and cruelty.**

Here's another story, a story about Ahab.

Ahab has been horribly injured by a whale.

But his wound becomes an obsession.

He doesn't simply want revenge against Moby Dick.

He feeds the revenge.

He talks about it. He thinks about it. He organizes his entire life around it. He recruits an entire crew into it.

Eventually, the whale isn't even just a whale anymore. It represents everything Ahab hates.

And the tragedy is that **his obsession destroys the very people he's responsible for. He never stopped feeding the obsession and revenge. And that anger he feels comes out as rage and destruction.**

And one last story. This story is about Mrs. Bennet.

Mrs. Bennet's situation really is frightening. Her daughters cannot inherit the family estate, and their financial security depends heavily on

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marriage. So Mrs. Bennet becomes obsessed with getting them married.

The problem is that she **feeds that fear constantly**. Every eligible man becomes a potential solution. Every social interaction becomes a potential opportunity or threat. She catastrophizes, compares, gossips, and pressures her daughters.

She's not wrong that the stakes are high.

She's just allowed her fear to become **the loudest voice in her heart**. **She feeds the fear, and her anxiety comes out as gossip and judgement.**

Miss Havisham, Ahab, and Mrs. Bennet...this is not a trio you want to spend time with.

Have you ever been in a bad mood, and in response turned on a sitcom, and before you know it, you're laughing? Your mood improves?

Has music ever changed your mood? Made you feel melancholy when you were fine just before you listened to that song?

What about the escape of social media? Has it ever changed your mood?

The content you consume - books, music, podcasts, tv, movies, radio, social media - plays a major role in your well being.

A study out of the University of Sussex found that watching just fourteen minutes of negative news showed increases in anxious and sad moods, and that's not all. It also showed a significant increase in the tendency to catastrophize a personal worry.

Let's talk about neuroscience for a minute.

Consumer Psychologist, L. J. Shrum, wrote in his book, *Social Psychology of Consumer Behavior*:

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“Television programs that focus on danger, violence, or disaster can activate the brain’s fear response, even when the events are not happening in real life. One key brain structure involved in this response is the amygdala, which helps detect threats and coordinate the body’s reaction to fear.

When the amygdala is activated, it signals the release of stress hormones such as cortisol. These hormones prepare the body to respond quickly by increasing heart rate, raising alertness, and focusing attention on possible sources of danger.

This reaction is necessary in real emergencies, but repeated exposure to threatening or emotionally intense media can keep the body in a prolonged state of stress. Over time, this may increase baseline anxiety levels and disrupt the sense of emotional security that helps people recover from daily stress.?

Social media usage activates the brain’s reward center by releasing dopamine, which can create addiction, depression, ADHD, and even schizophrenia.

In Stanford psychiatrist Anna Lembke’s book, *Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance in the Age of Indulgence*, she tells us that:

“We’re wired to connect. Our brains release dopamine when we make human connections, which incentivizes us to do it again.

But social connection has become druggified by social media, making us vulnerable to compulsive overconsumption. These apps can cause the release of large amounts of dopamine into our brains’ reward pathway all at once, just like heroin, or meth, or alcohol. They do that by amplifying the feel-good properties that attract humans to each other in the first place.

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Then there's novelty. Dopamine is triggered by our brain's search-and-explore functions, telling us, "Hey, pay attention to this, something new has come along." Add to that the artificial intelligence algorithms that learn what we've liked before and suggest new things that are similar but not exactly the same, and we're off and running.

Upon signing off, the brain is plunged into a dopamine-deficit state as it attempts to adapt to the unnaturally high levels of dopamine social media just released. Which is why social media often feels good while we're doing it but horrible as soon as we stop."

The things you consume, not with your mouth, but your brain, or your heart. Does it all look like this?

Anti-hero tv dramas, violence, books all about trauma, social media rewarding bad behavior, music focused on sex and violence, podcast hosts criticizing others, sleeping in all the time, isolating from friends and family.

Is this your life's diet?

Are you living an empty calorie lifestyle?

Do you know what empty calories are?

Empty calories are food and drink energy that give you calories but little to no vitamins, minerals, fiber, or protein. They add energy to your body, but they do not help your body stay healthy.

What might that look like, not as a food diet, but as a lifestyle? Maybe like that last slide?

What about this?

This might be the opposite of an empty calorie lifestyle. Perhaps this is a high protein lifestyle.

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Christian music, the Bible, prayer, meditation, devotionals, inspirational social media content, podcasts that are good for your mental health, uplifting tv shows, time with family and friends, time outside in nature.

And I don't mean that we should only surround ourselves with people who think exactly like we do. In fact, just last month, our ELCA Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry reminded us of the importance of building relationships with people of other faiths. He said that those relationships don't require us to set aside our Christian faith. In fact, they can deepen our understanding of our own faith.

Because sometimes the best thing we can put into our hearts is a little curiosity. A little listening. A little understanding. A willingness to sit across the table from someone who sees the world differently than we do.

That's part of a healthy heart, too.

All of these things are great. But remember when we were talking about a balanced diet earlier?

It's all about balance, it's all about moderation. We aren't expected to be perfect saints. We're flesh, we're human. It's ok to get some entertainment out of this life. We don't want to eat only baked, unseasoned chicken for every meal for the rest of our lives.

None of this is meant to shame anyone's choices, who am I to do that? This is a gentle nudge to perhaps be more mindful of your heart. Consider your heart's diet. Is it balanced?

Jesus said, "...what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles."

Miss Havisham, Ahab, and Mrs. Bennet had hearts full of bitterness because that's what they fed on. The heart doesn't become bitter all at once. We feed it something—a hurt, a fear, a resentment, a desire for

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control—and then we keep feeding it. And eventually what we've been feeding in secret starts coming out in public.

What feeds your heart posture?

You're here. You're worshiping. You're listening. You're thinking about your heart. That's feeding your heart, too.

So maybe this week, just pay a little more attention to what you're feeding it. Notice what makes you more anxious, more angry, more judgmental. And notice what makes you more grateful, more peaceful, more generous, more loving.

Because what we feed grows.

And here's the good news: we get to choose what we feed.

We can choose more time in God's Word. More prayer. More gratitude. More time with people who bring out the best in us. More music that lifts us up. More things that remind us of who we are and whose we are.

And when we realize we've been out of balance, feeding something we don't really want growing in our hearts, we don't have to beat ourselves up about it. We can simply start feeding something different.

Because God is still at work in us. And there's always room for something good to grow.

So feed your heart well. And trust that, with God's help, what you put in will begin to grow—and what grows will eventually find its way out into the world.

Amen.