

Nokesville UMC Sunday Worship
October 10, 2021
Jeff Brown, Lay Leader

Spiritual Diet

1 Timothy 6:17-19; Proverbs 28:25-27

We have heard it said, “you are what you eat”. Your physical health depends on what you consume; if you do not eat a proper diet and consume the needed nutrients for daily living, your health will decline, and eventually lead to complications and death. In the 1600’s sailors on longer voyages developed Scurvy due to a lack of vitamin C which led to anemia, weakness, sore arms & legs, and gum disease; it is eventually fatal.

Today we have the Food & Drug Administration requiring that all foods be labeled for content. This includes Nutrition Facts - the RDA, or recommended daily allowance or the “DV – daily value. With a simple glance at the package, we can see which foods have dietary benefits, and which are not so good for us. The Snickers Bar I consume has 11% of my daily value in calories and 15% of fat, but only 4% of fiber and calcium, but 0% Vitamin A & 0% vitamin C and iron. I would not take long for my health to decline if I only consumed Snickers Bars, though I would for a time enjoy it.

I know people including myself who have addressed their physical diet (or need to diet for their health) differently by the day. On Friday or Saturday, “The diet starts Monday”. When Monday comes, the follow through does not always arrive as planned, and it is often that we fall back into our bad dietary habits. These are “easy/convenient habits” that lead to physical decay and decline, mostly noted by eating out often and to excess. During the beginning of COVID, I was one of those people. I recognized the slip in my physical shape and overall diet as I gained weight over a 6-month period (plus 15 pounds). Since the holiday season last year, I was able to address my diet and lose 30 pounds (then gain back 5). If I am not diligent, I will be headed for a yo-yo or backslide out of the good health I was enjoying without the excess weight: I have had more energy, I could run a little faster on the softball field, & I was not tired all the time. And yet I have fallen back.

Our spiritual needs are not unlike our physical diet. What we consume can have a profound effect on our attitudes, personal interactions, and spiritual growth.

When Christ was tempted by the Devil as told in Matthew chapter 4, the Devil challenged him in verse 3: “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread”. Jesus answered, “It is written: Man does not live by bread alone”. So how is your spiritual diet?

In the Nokesville Community, and specifically in this church, the “menu” has changed over the years. We (the Church) are all responsible for the changes, but until last week I did not have a grasp on how

drastic those changes have been. Monte Irvin came up to me with an old archive from his grandfather's collection. Paul Irvin was the chairman of the Administrative Board in 1955. The archive Monte had was "The Year Book" for the Methodist Church, Nokesville VA, for the planning year 1955-1956. Among other things, it had within its pages the following items of interest to me:

- 1) A listing of all members, with the date they joined the church, and the minister who officiated. – I cannot tell you the precise date I joined the church.
- 2) A complete list of our former pastors from 1955 back to June 1, 1905.
- 3) All officers, Trustees, Stewards, and other Leaders.
- 4) Various groups including the Altar Guild (who took up a monthly communion collection for the Poor in the Community; I remember this as a Pastor's discretionary fund), the Commission of Finance, The Women's Society of Christian Service, the Dorothy Circle, the Martha Circle, the Virginia Circle, the Commission on Education, Commission on Missions, The Youth Fellowship, The Commission on Membership and Evangelism, & The Methodist Men.

In reading that Year Book, I got a kick out of seeing familiar names, including:

Sara Brown (my mother), who joined this church on April 20, 1947.

Betty Hoke, who joined this church on April 9, 1944

Mae Landis, who joined this church October 17, 1937

Vera Albrite, who joined this church September 17, 1935

Sara Lee Gay (Armstrong), who joined this church April 14, 1952

Virginia Fitzwater & Isabelle Free, who both joined this church December 7, 1919 – Virginia & Isabelle are the earliest members that I can remember meeting – Melanie and I would play cards with them some nights in the 1980's. They both attended our wedding in this building over 36 years ago.

I also noted some people and places in time, most notably:

A listing in the young adult class for Martha Whetzel

Mickey Irvin in the senior youth class

Sandra Albrite as a third grader

Scott Albrite as a first grader

And Debbie Hoke on the cradle roll

A lot has changed since 1955. Most of the membership then lived within 5 miles of the church, and their spiritual diet consisted of community planning and social engagement, along with a hefty dose of taking responsibility of the activities and life of the church. With TV in its infancy and few entertainment choices, life in general revolved around the church and the community.

Today, with improved roads and communication, many of our members live miles away – Melanie and I are 12 miles away and we are not even close to the regular attendee record, which I believe belongs to LaMonte & Susan Hugh live over 30 miles away. I can safely say that the COVID pandemic

and its effects on church have definitely affected my spiritual diet: pre-COVID we had church choir on Thursday nights, Church Softball on Fridays in the summer & fall, a church bowling league on Tuesday nights, and of course Sunday Worship. Not all of these events involved reading from scriptures or reading the bible, but they did help me build a spirit of community with my fellow members. Now, I believe it is well past time for us as a church to improve our spiritual diet.

When I contrast our church today (in fairness we are coming out of COVID) with our church of 70 years ago, I see two principal differences:

1) We were once centered around what in marketing would be called “multiple touches”. There was more to church than attending church on Sunday; there were various prayer circles and other events throughout the week. Today, there is rarely any church activity beyond Sunday worship, with a few minor exceptions.

2) Our membership was multiplied and growing. To be fair, having just come out of the Korean War and only 10 years removed from World War II, the country was looking for spiritual support and growth, and church was a natural place to try to gain some meaning to life and death. Today, we are trading water and trying not to lose members. Our young adults are few.

While it is easy to feel self-satisfied that we have done our best when we come to worship and attend church, never forget that the church is full of sinners. As long as we are repentant sinners (that is we recognize the sin, ask the Father for forgiveness, and mean it when we say we will try not to do it again), then our Lord God through Jesus Christ will forgive us our sins. If we fall into sinful ways with no call or effort to “repent” or change our ways, then we are not a church. Today my call is to repent of the diet we have been feeding ourselves, and strive to improve both personally and collectively.

I’m not saying that you who have felt the call to come to church this Sunday are any more of a sinner than I am, or that you who are watching from home somehow fall shorter than those who are here in person. What I am saying is that collectively we have fallen off our spiritual diet in a number of ways, and we need to take a good clean look at our condition and take steps to improve our spiritual diet before we die as a church. While not all inclusive, I believe that we can:

1) Read the bible daily. While you may already be holding to the pastor’s schedule, I am certain that many, including me, have not been diligent.

2) Start coming back to the pews. With the option to watch church on Facebook or You Tube available, many who once attended are content to watch remotely and feel that this is church. The remote option is certainly needed for our shut ins, and is clearly better than not coming at all. When you watch remotely you have separated yourself from the community. The old adage of “out of sight, out of mind” comes into play. The church may be in your sights, but YOU are not here to add to the experience and be enveloped by it.

3) Get involved in God's work. Join the choir – we need help as we are down to 8-9 attendees per week – if just two members from the same section are absent, we have lost a section. If you see a need in the community, bring it back to the Pastor or other church leader.

4) Reach out and INVITE someone. It is one thing to attend church; one of our obligations as Christians is to spread the Gospel and help others find Christ.

5) We give where we can – we can always do more. As Jesus said, "When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that our giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you".

I know that by many statistical measures we have done well in fighting through COVID and maintaining our strength. Our budget is balanced, we have been giving to the poor consistently, and those members who have had COVID have survived. As we adjust to what is hopefully a post COVID environment (or perhaps a coexistence with COVID), we need to improve our spiritual diet to allow us the strength, the will, and the ongoing desire to maintain and grow as a Church Body.

When I quoted the words of Jesus Christ early in this sermon, I left out a very important line. I said, "Man does not live on Bread alone". The line I left out is the key to what we need in our spiritual diet. The full quote of what Jesus said to Satan was that "Man does not live on Bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

The good news today is that hearing the word and reading the word is entirely within our reach and in our control. All it takes is the will to stay on a good spiritual diet. As I prayed to consider what would make a good sermon in preparation for today, God brought Monte Irvin to me. I was not present in church and receptive to hearing. God did not give me a burning bush audible command, but I think I heard what he wanted me to communicate.

How do we get the word?

1. By reading more.
2. By listening more to our preacher.
3. By talking more with others about our lives and our struggles and our successes and our failures with our pastor, or with other like-minded Christians who are right here with you, if you will just make the effort to be here with them.
4. By keeping an open mind. When God is talking to you, you have to be able to hear what is being said and not be distracted by the world at large. That requires a little "spiritual dieting" on your part.

With a spiritual diet that is content rich, we will all make this world a better place, and forever be rewarded in Heaven.