

Epiphany 4

January 31, 2010

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 1:4-10

Sermon Title: "The Ultimate Taste Test"

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our heavenly Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Our text for the Fourth Lord's Day after the Epiphany is taken from the Old Testament text where the prophet Jeremiah records in the first chapter:

"Then the Lord put out His hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, 'Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.'"

This is our text.

"You've got to taste this." We see and hear these words on TV and radio commercials for the latest and greatest soft drink that's out on the market. Our friends might even endorse a certain product or place to eat saying: "You've got to taste this knoephla, Pastor" during this past Ethnic Feast at Messiah or "You've got to try this new restaurant. It's got the best food". But that's not the only time that I've ever heard those words, and I'm sure you've heard them somewhere before. "You've got to taste this." So said our mothers as they thrust liver or lima beans or peas into our face. "You've got to taste this." So also might your spouses say as they thrust a spoonful of their latest concoction of tuna casserole, lutefisk, or anything else they might be experimenting on into your face.

But all of this pales in comparison to the ultimate taste test that the Lord Yahweh gives to the prophet Jeremiah as He places His Word into his mouth. Inwardly digesting Yahweh's Word is what this text is all about. In Jeremiah chapter fifteen, he says, "When Your words came, I ate them; they were the joy and delight of my heart." In this morning's text, Jeremiah is being called by God to be a prophet to the nation of Israel. In the first verses, God even tells Jeremiah "before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations". Jeremiah is sent by God to speak His holy Word, but he feels unworthy, doesn't he? He even says in verse six:

"Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth."

But Yahweh doesn't take "no" for an answer. The Lord goes on to tell Jeremiah: "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you..."

I might have mentioned this once before, so forgive me if I repeat myself, but at the Admissions Office at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, they have a sign on the door which reads: "God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called." As your pastor, I can tell you that Jeremiah is not unique in his response to God's call. Many pastors will tell you that when someone suggested for the first time that they might be a good pastor, they would have either laughed, thought the person was joking, or said "Who, me? You've got the wrong guy!" I had been attending college with every intention of entering the Seminary myself when I first began to experience doubts as to my worthiness for such a lofty calling. So, much like Jonah, I ran away in the opposite direction. I became a teacher, and I ran first to southern California and then to Florida before I finally answered the urgings of my parents and pastors as well as God's call to become an ordained minister. Like Jeremiah, I was young and still wet behind the ears, I felt unworthy and unqualified, and there are still times when I wonder if I did the right thing.

But then, like He did for Jeremiah, Yahweh promises that His Word will be sufficient. We are to preach the Word in season and out of season, whenever we have the opportunity to do so, because God will put His Word to use through a bunch of cracked pots like Jeremiah or even me.

Having this Word placed in his mouth, Jeremiah is ready for what life would serve up. In chapter 26 he is accused by his enemies, and Yahweh's Word vindicates him when officials come to his defense by claiming that Jeremiah is echoing an earlier prophecy from Micah. Three chapters later Jeremiah hears about hopeless exiles, so he communicates Yahweh's Word to them by means of a letter. In chapters 51 and 52 Jeremiah is so overwhelmed with the raw evil of Babylon, so Yahweh gives him a Word that says in part, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!"

In Jeremiah's lifetime Judah would lose everything: temple and sacrifice, monarchy, cities and the land. But Judah would still have the Word, and this Word would undermine tyranny and mobilize the faithful. No wonder Jeremiah calls this Word his joy and delight, the love of his life.

To define our lives, Yahweh places His Word in our mouths as well. It's a word that is "the power of God for the salvation of all who believe"—a Word that is "a lamp to our feet and a light to our path".

But isn't there something tastier, more appetizing, with a bit more pizzazz, so to speak? Here it is. For breakfast: one-half grapefruit, one piece of whole wheat toast, no butter, and eight ounces of skim milk. For lunch: four ounces of lean broiled chicken breast, skin removed, one cup of steamed zucchini, a diet Pepsi, and one Girl Scouts Thin Mint cookie. For a snack, the rest of the package of Thin Mints (frozen, of course), one quart chocolate fudge ice cream, with chocolate syrup on top. For dinner: two loaves of garlic bread, heavy on the butter, one meat lover's pizza, extra cheese, a large milk shake with whipped cream, and for dessert, three Milky Way candy bars and an entire frozen cheesecake!

Oh, we try, don't we? We try to stay on a spiritual diet of God's Word that brings vigor and health and strength and power. But then we slip: one Oreo cookie, one crumb of coveting, one piece of pornography, one slice of gossip, one sip of sarcasm, and then *the rest of the package of Thin Mints!* The enemy thrusts this junk food in front of us on a silver platter and with a sly grin watches it all disappear. Filled with his miserable morsels, our desire to inwardly digest this Word become a chore, a bore, a snore until we say, "no more!"

So Yahweh serves up one more Word; a more vindicating Word than that written by Micah in Jeremiah's defense, a more hopeful Word than that penned to exiles, a more victorious Word than that spoken against Babylon, and a more enduring Word than anything written by Jeremiah. For coming down past the galaxies, past our solar system, past the moon and the stars, this Word became flesh and appeared in the stillness of the night, in the whisper of a baby. And as a man his appetite is defined in the book of Hebrews: "So that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone."

Talk about the ultimate taste test! Jesus tasted the demonic delight called death, the soldiers' spit, their cheap wine, sweat funning down His cheeks, He tasted even his own blood. But there was more. He drank the cup of the Father's wrath to the very last drop.

But Jesus didn't merely taste Death. He swallowed him whole, chewed him up, and spit him out. "Death has been swallowed up in victory!" And now the spirit of the risen Christ creates in us a new hunger and a new thirst for righteousness. Spirit led, "like newborn babes we crave pure spiritual milk now that we have tasted that the Lord is good". Not only do we crave this spiritual milk, but we also feed on God's Word made flesh every time that we gather around the Lord's Table and the cross of Calvary and eat the Word made flesh and drink His blood for the forgiveness of sins.

And now, on a steady diet of Yahweh's Word and accused by the enemy, we can answer confidently, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus". This food inspires and creates hope in the midst of our hopelessness: "In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope". When enemies mock and deny this word, we have an even more powerful Word, spoken by Jesus: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away". And sustained by this Word when faced with the raw evil of Babylon we cry out, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!" like John echoes for us in the book of Revelation.

Now the LORD reaches out His hand to touch your mouth and says to you, "Now, I am putting my words in your mouth." As we celebrate this Epiphany season, may we continue to hold fast to this Word. May we indeed, "Taste and see that the Lord is good" as we live our lives craving the spiritual milk and the body and blood of our Lord and Savior. For that's the ultimate taste test, indeed! Thank God that He has done this great thing for Jesus' sake. Amen.

And now the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord, Amen.