

The Jesus Diet

John 6:24-35

Slide: Junk Food

Americans seem to love their junk food. After all, McDonalds has been around for a long time. Fast food is a part of our culture. It's such a part of our culture that if you just go to the grocery store, it's likely that the potato chips will take up an aisle all on their own. I can do without potato chips if I had to, but I am rather partial to corn chips.

And, when I came to find out I was gluten intolerant, I found out that chips are often full of gluten if you looked hard at the label. And, then I would find these organic kinds of corn chips that claimed to be healthy using healthy oils and all that. Don't get me wrong. I still love corn chips. But, they are a guilty pleasure. If compared to a bushel of broccoli, it's clear what the real healthy choice is.

Slide: WOW!

Which reminds me of that time when Frito-Lay thought it would be a good idea to put a new

fat called Olestra into their chips. It was 1998 and the name of the chips was called WOW. These WOW potato chips had ZERO fat and only 75 calories per ounce. Zero fat you might say? Well, the fat they created fooled the body. Chemists created new fat-like molecules that were larger and more complex than those found in nature.

They were designed so that our digestive systems couldn't recognize or attack them, and passed through the intestinal tract untouched. In other words, your small intestine couldn't digest it, so it would just pass through. That's what made it fat free. Does anyone remember those? I actually only ever tried one chip but the idea of them made me not want to try another.

While as the WOW potato chip might have seemed like a dieter's perfect food at the time, the serving size was just one ounce, and if you have ever eaten potato chips, one ounce is pretty hard to stick to. Most people would eat more than an ounce. I mean, after all, Frito-Lay's motto was "you can't eat just one," so one ounce is a small amount when it comes to junk food.

Slide: Olestra Chemistry

You can probably imagine what happened. It sent people to the bathroom because more than one ounce acted like a laxative. It was an amazing feat of creative chemistry to make a food that the body would consider inert enough that it wouldn't use it. But, the human body, it turns out, rather likes to digest food and use it for nutritional purposes. The quick and easy always, always has its downsides. By the year 2000, this multimillion dollar diet gimmick went down the toilet...in more ways than one.

The WOW potato chip was an example of what was at the time the latest fad to lose weight quickly. Everything was low fat. Only later did the research pan out to show that low fat diets don't work. Good, healthy fats have excellent value for the body. Perhaps the overall problem with quick weight loss is our desire to get rid of it as fast as possible rather than making the long, lasting, arduous changes for overall health of one's life; Hence the difference between diet and nutrition. One is about losing weight. The other is about commitment to health, to

moderation and a commitment that lasts.

Slide: I am the bread

This reminds me of our Gospel for today. Jesus is giving the crowd who follow them a new diet, one that will last, but they just want the quick fix of the physical loaves Jesus gave them the day before in that miracle feeding of 5,000 people, not unlike the Israelites who wandered the desert looking for bread to eat. They just don't want to have to work so hard for bread when Jesus can just supply it for them. So, like their forebears, when Jesus says he is the bread of life, no doubt they are remembering their ancestor's history about receiving manna. They are looking for an endless buffet of material goods but Jesus is offering them a way of life, one that spiritually takes practice and even sacrifices.

Here, the Jesus diet won't do if you want results fast and without any effort. Sure, this gift of the spiritual life is a free gift and Jesus gives it freely, but it's not an ala carte, take what you want but leave the rest. To receive what Jesus has to offer us takes the whole diet plan, it takes the whole

of one's life and it takes practice; but the rewards are filling and full.

Slide: Recognizing Spiritual...

Yet, as usual, the people in today's Gospel are likely thinking that when Jesus says he is the true bread from Heaven, that he means physical bread he will give them. But, that's not the point that Jesus is trying to make. In fact, it seems that Jesus isn't talking about physical bread at all. Jesus also isn't offering something that takes no preparation or effort to receive it. Jesus is offering something a lot more substantial, eternal life...an eternal life that takes his life on a cross to make it happen.

And, in this Gospel text, Jesus says that all that is needed to receive him, as the bread of life is faith, belief in him, as he said,

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. "

Here, Jesus offers the true **diet** that continues a lifetime, the spiritual journey of faith that lasts forever rather than the physical fleeting need for bread to sustain you

physically. This bread he offers, himself, is not fleeting and will not only fill you up for a brief time. This bread will give you enough faith for an eternal life.

But, there is a catch. Again, we see that the crowd does not understand, and even if they do, that's not what they want. They simply want Jesus to take care of their problems easily. But, I get it. Life is full of trials, both individually and corporately. Our lives, our families, our country, our world is mired in strife, hate, and conflict, so the idea of the quick fix, the fad diet, the continuous easy spiritual life that takes no work would be helpful for us. It just is easier to take or leave Jesus when we want to. I see why these that followed Jesus after being fed bread and fish were just hoping for some manna to get them by.

Slide: Read Me!

But, Jesus never promises us an easy life. He doesn't promise health, or wealth, or any of the things in life that make life easier, even if our faith is sufficient. In fact, the practice of following Jesus is a lifelong, hard practice and faith is not an easy thing.

However, what Jesus does promise is that through all that, faith in him will enable us to live rich lives now in the eternal life that is ours now. Jesus does promise to walk with us, guide us, and be present with us. But, it's not a fast thing. Results are often seen in a lifetime.

And yet, thank God we do have a tangible sign given to us to keep us on that difficult diet of faith. This tangible gift is a foretaste of the feast to come. It is a grace gift. It is the true bread from heaven given for us. Call it what you will: The Lord's Supper, Holy Communion or Eucharist, this gift of life, does help us on the way to keep up the Jesus diet. It sustains our baptism. It helps us on the way as we practice the Christian life.

Slide: I Am the Bread

God knows that we are often trapped in the physical, tangible world, that what we see and touch is what we often believe. So, God *does* choose a tangible, physical, common thing to feed that, which cannot be seen: our spirit. This bread is the true presence of Jesus Christ for the here and now.

Think of this bread as spirit bread. A little bit of it cannot sustain us physically; nor can it promise health, wealth, and things, but it does sustain, nourish and grant us eternal life through the sacrifice of Christ's body, the true bread from Heaven, given for us. And, even beyond the spiritual health benefits, this bread is also truly Christ, in, under, and over the bread that is given for you. Christ does this for you, so that you may be ultimately fulfilled, not in a quick spiritual fix, but in him.

Slide: Communion Wafers

Now that's a great diet to stick to. May this bread, which is Jesus, nourish and sustain your journey in faith, through Christ our Lord, in unity with God our creator and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

