

Grace to receive the Word

Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and **inwardly digest** them that, by patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

As you may have noticed, the title I've given to this sermon is "Have a Taste!" With the enticing aroma of sausage and potato pancakes wafting through the air, it seemed only appropriate since so many are going to be enjoying (or have already enjoyed) the Men's Club Breakfast today! But actually the sense of taste has quite a bit to do with today's Old Testament reading.

Speaking of taste, have you ever heard these words before: "Just try it. You won't know if you like it, unless you try it." Yes, our mothers used words like that to urge us to eat up those wonderful vegetable delicacies like Brussel Sprouts, Green Beans, or Lima Beans. "You've got to taste this." "You don't know what you're missing!" So said our grandmothers as they try to get us to taste some strange substance they called "fruit cake." Along those lines, I remember going to my first Christmas dinner with Amy's side of the family soon after we were married. There, in an attempt to impress my new family, particular Amy's grandparents I had my first taste of lutefisk. By the way, it has also been my **only** taste of lutefisk- ever!

But all of **these** taste tests pale in comparison with the taste test that the LORD God gives to Jeremiah in our Old Testament this morning as He places His Word into Jeremiah's mouth. **Inwardly digesting** God's Word, that's what this text is all about. In fact, a little bit later on in the book of Jeremiah, chapter 15 verse 16, the prophet says to God, "When Your words came, I ate them; they were the joy and delight of my heart." (NIV)

Jeremiah wasn't **always** so eager and ambitious when it came to God's Word. In fact, when God called Jeremiah to go and speak His Word to others, Jeremiah followed a pattern similar to a lot of other men in the Old Testament when God tapped their shoulder and told them to get to work. Like Moses, Gideon, and Isaiah before him, Jeremiah was more than just a little hesitant to jump in and do the work God called him to do. It's likely Jeremiah was a teenager at this point in his life, and so his excuse is "Ah, Lord GOD! ... I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But God tells Jeremiah not to sell himself short and to not be scared. "Do not be afraid for I am with you to deliver you."

Then God assures Jeremiah why he has absolutely no reason to be afraid. Picking up at verse 9, “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.” That’s a lot of power for one person to have! But the power comes from God’s Word and it’s not for Jeremiah to do with as he pleases, rather it’s for God to accomplish His good and loving purpose through Jeremiah.

On His own, without that Word of God, Jeremiah is weak, but having this Word placed in his mouth, Jeremiah is ready for whatever life will serve up. For example, in chapter 26, Jeremiah’s enemies accuse him of speaking lies when God told Jeremiah to warn others that Jerusalem will be destroyed unless the people turn from their sin. Sure enough, God’s Word vindicates Jeremiah when officials come to his defense by claiming that he really *is* telling the truth of God’s Word. In fact, Jeremiah’s words echo an earlier oracle from the prophet Micah chapter 3 verse 12. God is keeping Jeremiah safe just as He promised.

In chapter 29, Jeremiah hears about hopeless exiles, taken by force to Babylon. So he decides to communicate the LORD’s Word to them through a letter. He gives them hope and encouragement from God. Then in chapters 51 and 52 Jeremiah is overwhelmed with the raw evil of Babylon, so the LORD gives him a Word on a scroll that says in part, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!” And in chapter 36 when King Jehoiakim *destroys* the Word of God that Jeremiah has written, the LORD tells Jeremiah to write another Word!

In Jeremiah’s lifetime, Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel would lose everything: The Temple, with its great Altar, the place to offer sacrifices to God, would be destroyed. The cities and the land would be plundered, the last of the kings would be hauled away in exile along with many of the people. But Judah would still have the **Word**, and this Word would undermine the tyranny of Babylon and mobilize the faithful people of Israel. No wonder Jeremiah calls this Word his joy and delight, the love of his life (15:16).

To define *our* lives, God places His Word in our mouths, too. It’s a word that is “the power of God for the salvation of all who believe” as St. Paul says it in Romans 1:16. It’s a Word that is “a lamp to our feet and a light to our path” as the psalmist sings in Psalm 119:105.

But isn’t there something tastier, more appetizing than God’s Word, something with a bit more pizzazz? Sure! Here’s how that looks: For breakfast: one-half grapefruit, one piece of whole wheat toast, no butter, eight ounces of skim milk, coffee-black. For lunch: four ounces of lean broiled

chicken breast, skin removed, one cup of steamed zucchini, herb tea, no sugar, **one** Oreo cookie. For snack, ... the **rest** of the package of Oreo cookies, one quart chocolate ice cream, and one jar of hot fudge. For dinner, two loaves of garlic bread, heavy on the butter, one large sausage and pepperoni pizza, extra cheese, a large milk shake, and for dessert, three Snickers candy bars with 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, health, strength and power. But then we **slip**: one Oreo cookie, one crumb of coveting, one piece of profanity, one slice of slander, one sip of sarcasm, and then the rest of the package of Oreo cookies! The enemy, the devil, thrusts this junk food before us on silver trays and with a sly grin watches it all disappear. Filled with his miserable morsels, our desire to inwardly digest God's Word becomes, as a professor of mine once cleverly put it, "a chore, a bore, a snore, until we say, 'no more'"! (Reed Lessing, CJ, 32:4)

So the LORD would serve up one **more** Word; a more **vindicating** Word than that written by Micah in Jeremiah's defense, a more **hopeful** Word that that written to exiles, a more **victorious** Word than that spoken against Babylon, and a more **enduring** word than the one **re**-written by Jeremiah for old King Jehoiakim. For coming down past the galaxies and the stars, into our world, this Word became flesh and appeared in the silence of a night, in the whisper of a baby. And as a man, His appetite is defined in Hebrews 2:9, "So that by the grace of God He might **taste death** for everyone."

Talk about a taste test! Jesus tasted the demonic delight called death, the soldiers' spit, their cheap wine, sweat running 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 (Jer. 25: 15, 17, 25).

But Jesus not only **tasted** Death. He **swallowed** it up up, chewed it up, and spit it out. "Death has been swallowed up in victory! (1 Cor. 15:54). And now the spirit of the risen Christ creates in **us** a new hunger and thirst for righteousness. Led by the Holy Spirit, "like newborn babies we crave pure spiritual milk now that (we) have tasted that the Lord is good" (1 Ptr. 2:2-3). On a steady diet of God's Word and accused by the enemy, we say, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). This food gives us true hope in the midst of our hopelessness: In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope" (1 Ptr. 1:3). When enemies mock and deny this word we have a more powerful word, spoken by Jesus. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:34). And sustained by this Word when faced with the raw evil of

Babylon, (by that I mean the wickedness of this world), we cry out, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!” (Rev. 18:2).

Now the LORD reaches out His hand to touch ***your*** mouth and says to you, “Now, I am putting My words in your mouth.” What a Word, what power, what blessings, what a life! Amen.