

## **Sermon Epiphany 4 Year B**

### Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Moses said: The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: “If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.” Then the Lord replied to me: “They are right in what they have said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command. Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable. But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die.”

### 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; but anyone who loves God is known by him.

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. “Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

### The Gospel Mark 1:21-28

Jesus and his disciples went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

**Prayer:**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
AMEN

**Sermon:**

Even though I have never been a decent musician,  
In the '70's I carried a guitar around wherever I went.  
Occasionally I played it poorly and sang songs.  
For money.

Once I was banging away on my old guitar in San Francisco.  
A rich lady in a fancy car asked me if I wanted to sing  
with her group. I said "No".  
For all I know she was Grace Slick. *But I doubt it.*

When you're as broke as I was any car looks fancy.  
A loaf of fresh sourdough is a feast.

I was never much at all, that's for sure,  
but I've always loved to sing and I love good lyrics.

The other day I heard a weird song from back in the day,  
called "The Year of the Cat".<sup>i</sup>

"On a morning from a Bogart movie  
In a country where they turn back time  
You go strolling through the crowd like Peter Lorre  
Contemplating a crime"

Such a weird blend of astrology, Bogart,  
and the song “As Time Goes By”,  
from the great film Casablanca. *“Here’s to you Kid”*.

I’ve always loved Folk Music.  
Old songs by Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell and Don McLean.  
But I remember when I also thought that  
“Stairway to Heaven” was profound.

There's a sign on the wall  
But she wants to be sure  
*'Cause you know sometimes words have two meanings.* <sup>ii</sup>

Whoever wrote that song for Led Zeppelin was right:  
*Words can have two meanings.* <sup>iii</sup>  
Which brings us to today’s readings.<sup>iv</sup>

In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians St. Paul wrote that  
“Food will not bring us close to God”.  
*But, Isn’t breaking bread what we do?*<sup>v</sup>

St. Paul wrote about the pagan practice of dedicating food to idols.

Back then some people thought the idols *were* Gods,  
But others thought not.  
*The statues never ate the food, that’s for sure.*

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century after Jesus,  
many folks thought his followers were pagans.

Christians were a dangerous cult that denied both  
the Roman pantheon of gods,  
and the recently developed deity of the Emperor. vi

But, the Romans said:

As long as you sacrifice to the gods,  
you can believe anything else you want.

*If not, say Hello to the Lions!*

That must have seemed like a very tempting proposal.vii  
People loved life then just like we do now.

Who can blame a person for exercising a little flexibility?  
Don't we all do that once in a while?

I think that St. Paul told them,

God is God, You can relax.

God isn't going to be rattled  
if you lose track for a moment.viii

You cannot change the character of bread, he said,  
by sacrificing it to a non-existent God,  
any more than you can change a loaf of sourdough  
by dedicating it to a picture of John Lennon. ix

But Food can be a substitute for God and for love. x

Words can have two meanings.

Working to feed the world's poor and hungry is a holy task.  
And so is working to feed the world's spiritual hunger.

We feed souls here, at our table.

The Holy Eucharist – began as a physical meal –  
And yet it feeds our souls.

“Lord ... Grant that all who share this bread and cup  
may become one body and one spirit....”<sup>xi</sup>

St. Paul wrote: “Food will not bring us close to God.”  
It won’t matter if you eat or don’t eat.

But don’t let freedom of choice become a stumbling block.

That’s good wisdom.

Freedom of choice.

Every generation has its risks; Satan never rests.

Haven’t we all seen people driving too slow  
or weaving on the highway,

More dedicated to their cell phone, than to life itself?<sup>xii</sup>

Who hasn’t been that person? Satan never rests.

We might think about what helping feed the poor.

Coffee, and beans and bacon and veggies.

But what about the spiritual food ... here, at our table?

What is “food”?

Sometimes words have two meanings.

It’s a mistake to feed the body and starve the soul.

And it’s a mistake to feed the soul,

While stomachs are empty.<sup>xiii</sup>

If the lack of real world food is a cause of someone falling,  
we must feed the body.

If the lack of spiritual food is their weakness, we must feed the  
soul.<sup>xiv</sup>

Words have two meanings.

Food for the body.

Food for the soul.

Not one without the other.

Give whatever the moment requires.

**-AMEN**

---

<sup>i</sup> Al Stewart ... 1976

---

<sup>ii</sup> Emphasis added

<sup>iii</sup> Or ask a politician ... maybe way more than just two meanings!

<sup>iv</sup> Deuteronomy is rather odd: “If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.” If we had a few hours we could figure what the assembly at Horeb was about, the part about a great fire, and the voice of the Lord, and dying. We’d have to dig in pretty deep to tackle the New Testament’s comments about eating meat, and knowledge, and sin and stumbling blocks. How about a class on: “Scriptures, Metaphors and Rock in Roll”?

<sup>v</sup> In the 1970’s a soft rock band called Bread, sang about how it feels to miss out on the obvious: “If a picture paints a thousand words, Then why can’t I paint you?” Bread was slang for “money” back then. Money was something I usually did not have enough of. But as long as I had gas, cigarettes, coffee and berries from the bush by my cottage in Berkeley, I could get by.

<sup>vi</sup> Most Jewish folks thought that Jesus was a pretender, and a false prophet.

<sup>vii</sup> The alternative was torture and death, or at least the loss of your life’s earnings.

<sup>viii</sup> ... and focus on false gods.

<sup>ix</sup> See, Corinthians: “Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth ... there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. .... “Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.”

<sup>x</sup> PRISM, is a Christian weight loss program that helps us recognizing that a right relationship with food can help us find our way back to God. When food is a substitute for God it takes us in the other direction.

<sup>xi</sup> See, Book of Common Prayer, page 373.

<sup>xii</sup> Theirs or ours.

<sup>xiii</sup> St. Paul tells us that we are called to offer food to those weak believers for whom Christ died, so that they may not be destroyed.

<sup>xiv</sup> We in the Episcopal Church have a wonderful song to sing. Ours is a tune about love, and acceptance, and Christ’s Kingdom