

Chapel Hill United Church of Christ

Sunday Sermon

Slow-Food Feast

Luke 13: 1-9
Isaiah 55: 1-9

Rev. Dr. Galen E. Russell III
March 7, 2010

“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen Carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.”

Prayer: Holy God, may we move from doubt to deep faith that your provisions are real and really matter. Amen.

Perhaps it can go without even saying it that we live in a fast-paced, fast-track, fast-food world. Right? We like the ease of all that, the convenience. We like the drive-through mentality—when we’re in a hurry and want something quick, fast, convenient, just order it and drive on through.

I began to wonder what that would look like if we had a drive-through right here at Chapel Hill UCC. And, we’re in luck... because today we have four “non-Oscar nominated” actors with us to present a mini skit showing what it would be like to have a drive-through at Chapel Hill UCC. Because, you know what? Your time is important, right? And, I want you to have church done your way, right away, every day!! So, I invite our four “non-Oscar nominated” thespians to come forward.

[Bill drives up to the box.] Galen: Welcome to Chapel Hill United Church of Christ, where God is still speaking, How may we feed you today?

BILL: *Hi. I'd like an order of the Holy Spirit... uh, make that a jumbo order of the Holy Spirit. I'd like extra goose bumps to go along with it, but hold the relationship. And, may I have one choir anthem and a short prayer on the side.*

Galen: OK, that's one jumbo Holy Spirit with goose bumps, no relationship. One choir anthem and a short prayer. Is that it? *Yes.* May I interest you in a sermon? *Uh... not today, thanks.* Are you sure? *Yes, I'm sure.* Very well. Your total payment required is an open heart, a hopeful attitude, and a little bit of faith. Please pull around to the next window to receive your order.

[Terry pulls up.] Galen: Hi. Welcome to Chapel Hill United Church of Christ, where we get your order right the first time, every time, all the time, on time, to the end of time... How may we feed you today?

TERRY: *Uh... Hello... Hello. How may we feed you today? I'd like two songs, a short prayer, and a fifteen minute sermon.* Would you like your sermon to be sweet and soothing or hellfire and brimstone? *Sweet and soothing, please.*

[calls to the back] One mamby-pamby sermon! What would you like in your songs? *May I please have one that touches my heart and the other that lifts my spirit?* Certainly. Anything else? *No thanks... oh wait...! May I please have a*

children's education class that has Bible stories in it? Certainly. Will that be all?
Yes, please. Thank you. Your total requirement is an open heart, a hopeful attitude, and a little bit of faith. Please pull around to the next window to receive your order.

[Barbara pulls up.] Galen: Hi. Welcome to Chapel Hill United Church of Christ, where no matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are always welcome here. How may we feed you today?

BARBARA: *Hi. Do you have parking spaces, preferably out of the sun?* Yes, we do, but our parking spaces are not reserved. You get them as they are available. *OK. Um... I'd like please a small group Bible study that doesn't challenge me too much... and I'd like donuts on the side with it. Can I have also two clapping songs, and one blessing to go?* A simple Bible study, donuts, two songs, and a blessing. Is that all? *Yes.* Thank you. Your total requirement is an open heart, a hopeful attitude, and a little bit of faith. Please pull around to the next window to receive your order.

[Bob pulls up.] Galen: Hi. Welcome to Chapel Hill United Church of Christ, where our faith is over 2000 years old, but our thinking is not! How may we feed you today

BOB: *Who's preaching today?* Pastor Russell is preaching today. *Oh. Well...*

I guess that's OK. Is he preaching on the Old Testament ? Yes, he is. *Well..., I guess that will have to do... I prefer the New Testament.* I understand, sir. God in the Old Testament has a lot of wrath, and God in the New has a lot of love. But, today's Old Testament text has a lot of love in it. What do wish for today? *I guess just get me two creative illustrations that make me laugh, one unison prayer... and ... umm... a healing for my bunion.* Illustrations, uni-prayer, bunion healing... Will that be all? *Yes.* May I interest you in making an offering? *No thanks.* Are you sure? *I'm sure.* Absolutely sure? *Positive!* Hmph! Very well. Your total payment required is an open heart, a hopeful attitude, and a little bit of faith. Please pull around to the next window to receive your order.

How about a hand for our actors! Thanks to each of you. What if we had a church like that? A fast-food church... a church that aims to please everyone...? A church of convenience. A church with a mentality that every person is entitled to have church "my way." 'You get what you pay for' is also common to our thinking. Isn't it?

Also common to human thought is the 'You get what you deserve' mentality. The stories for today found in the gospel of Luke are good cases in point. It was commonly thought that the deaths of these people came about since they had sinned... that they got what they deserved. Jesus' parable about the fruitless fig

tree demonstrates the same thinking... if it doesn't produce, kill it. Take it out. Cut it down.

We're so used to fair trade, you get something for something, that we think this is the way God thinks, too. But, it isn't so! Jesus says that the gardener came to the rescue and gave the fig tree another chance. God is like that—that is Jesus' point. God gives second, third, fourth, etc. chances.

Isaiah says that God's ways are not our ways. What God offers are free gifts. Rich food that nourishes the heart. Food that satisfies. Love. Forgiveness. Tenderness. Mercy. Pardon. Grace. These are not intended for us to pick up on the run... for us to grab on the go... these are for us as we slow down, incline our ear to God, and listen to God's word. We are called to the slow food feast. This is God's way.

God's ways go against the basic way of life we are so used to—fair trade. Consumerism. And, if we really examine our ways, we find that they are not all what they are cracked up to be.

It's kind of like the story of US Astronaut James Irwin talking about what he experienced when he walked on the moon. Irwin said, "It was one of the most profoundly disillusioning moments of my life." What made it so? Irwin explained further, "All of my life I have been enchanted by the romance and the mystery of

the moon. I sang love songs under the moon. I read poems by moonstruck poets. I looked up in wonder at the lunar sphere. But that day when I stepped from the capsule onto the lunar surface and reached down at my feet, I came up with nothing but two handfuls of gray dusty dirt. I cannot describe the loss I felt as the romance and mystery were stripped away” (http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/illustrations_for_installment.asp?installment_id=3231, retrieved March 5, 2010).

Do you think that as Christians we have a responsibility to live ever aware that there is nothing more valuable than the gifts of God, even in the face of fair trade, capitalism, and consumerism? I think it is vital for us to focus on the slow-food feast with the inexpensive gifts that God offers instead of concentrating on the expensive things of our world that in the end are not spiritually satisfying... that in the end have no sustenance.

Also as Christians, are we to challenge ourselves to believe in the ancient wisdom of God over our modern day wisdom? Should we prefer God’s thoughts about what is good as opposed to our own thoughts? We do have to balance the changing modern cultural context with the stable word of God, don’t we? Several high school youth who traveled last summer to Thailand with the Lancaster Theological Seminary program called *Leadership Now* were impressed that a

Buddhist monk they met carried a cell phone in an inside pocket of his robe. It was an example of a religion venerating the rich spiritual values of the past while living in the present. God's slow-food feast told to us today from ancient words are held in high esteem as we live in the present day.

Let us remember that the perhaps the most powerful ancient word coming to us is the word about how God feeds us spiritually—through Jesus Christ! Our slow-food feast of love, forgiveness, mercy, pardon, and grace is the satisfying rich food offered because Jesus, God's only son, gave his life that we might live. This is God's wisdom, God's way that is higher than our way.

It is kind of like the traditional story coming from the native tribe of the Algonquin people. A handsome prince appears and orders that he be killed and his body buried. His grave is to be carefully tended. Soon a vigorous patch of corn is growing over the grave. Thus, the prince, actually the corn God of the Algonquin people, is reborn in the year's harvest providing food for his children (Flurer, James, A., Towers in the Light, Fairway Press, 1994, p. 81).

For us, the story of our living, dying, rising God comes to its fullest, ultimate expression in Christ Jesus, who offers to us the opportunity to indulge in the slow-feast that satisfies, delights, and is the everlasting food for the soul.

Come! Eat. Drink. Not fast, but slowly. God's gifts are free to us. Amen.