

It dawned on me after what was said last Sunday that maybe a key thing in this time of Lent is to be concerned about what we put into ourselves, and how we choose to fill our lives. I think that this is the deep reason behind the whole idea of “giving up something for Lent.” If we are in fact dealing with addictions, we have to face the possibility that we end up filling our lives with things that are not good for us, or cause some other damage. For so many years I have loved these words from Isaiah 55, words that bring a key section of that book to a close.

We might notice from the Bible that we humans have always needed food and water, and as much as we tend to take it all for granted due to our good fortune in life, food and water are pretty wondrous and essential. So, in a sense here in Isaiah we have God gently inviting us all to eat and drink, even if we have no money and no way to secure these things. God will provide them. But then the great question is asked: *Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?* What a great question, especially for us who are so blessed in the food and water department. Of all people, we should never be paying for *that which is not bread*. But we do. And the sanctity of FOOD and its essential nature for any of us to live, we really need to ask ourselves some big questions about how food works in our world today, but especially in our own land. So we have some things to hear today that will unsettle us a bit, but we need to make sure that we are not feeding upon that which is not bread.

I know that our church is a very good church when it comes to Mission concerns, and food concerns. I know that we try to track down those who are hungry so that we can help. Many churches do not do these things. In fact most of the churches of I have served did not care about this. I am very thankful that you do care. But I need to move us in a different direction here today. From our **Addict Nation** book, I need to share some concepts and facts. In spite of the care we might show to others who are hungry, there is another problem. We are a gluttonous nation. Modern Americans are addicted to food. Also, we eat twice as much meat as other people do in more advanced countries. And not only do we eat far more than anyone else, and especially far more of what is actually very bad for us, but we are consumed with food.

A few years ago, the New York Times Book Review showed that for our society, most of the books on this list were either about cooking, preparing, or losing weight from eating too much. We now, with our 400 channels of TV, have many channels dedicated to cooking. I've never seen anything so boring, but they seem to be very popular. That may seem harmless enough, but it is estimated today that 10% of all of our nation's expense for health care involves illnesses stemming from overeating. But there is more...

It seems that many people are actually addicted to food, and certain kinds of food at that. I remember there was a show called "**The Biggest Loser**" which was about people trying to lose weight, and they compete against others doing the same.

Here is a quote from a guy named Danny Cahill who won on that program:

***“I felt like I was addicted to food. Of course I was. How else do you get to 450 pounds? I would eat all the time. I would go through the fast food drive-through on the way home from work before I would eat dinner. I felt like I couldn’t stop. I say it is a drug. It’s the cheapest drug out there. That’s what makes it so potent. You can pull in at any time and for one dollar you can get a double cheeseburger.”***

Wow! People don’t normally talk like that, or do they? If they do, maybe we should listen. How could people actually be addicted to food? All we need to do is ask the many pediatricians in our land, and they’ll let us know what they think. They’ll let us know what they think of feeding our kids fast food. But we need to take apart a puzzle here. In America today, we are addicted to sugar, empty carbs, and meat, usually very inexpensive meat. In the last 40 years, America has tripled the amount of corn grown, mainly by super-sized agri-businesses. Corn is king. And if you didn’t notice, corn is in almost everything we eat. It is heavily subsidized by the government, which keeps the price low for many foods that aren’t good for us.

By the way, just to see how strange this is, take a guess at the area of the US determined to be the unhealthiest in the country? Huntington, WV. In the 5-county area that surrounds Huntington, the poverty rate is at 20%. These are poor Appalachian people. They are very poor in that area, and

almost 50% of the people there are overweight. In our land, poverty is more and more marked by people being overweight. How can that be? Well, if you don't have much money, you eat the cheapest food possible. I myself go to Wendy's and get a grilled chicken sandwich, recyclable cup of mandarin oranges, and ice tea. Usually while in line, I see person after person order from the "Dollar Menu." It's a good deal. But we have to ask about the quality of the food being offered for that dollar. By the way, back in 2004 there was a movie called **Super-Size Me** about a man who decided to experiment and eat nothing but fast food. After only a month, he had gained 25 pounds and began to suffer liver dysfunction and depression. It took the man almost a year to get back to his normal weight and health. How many people eat this kind of food every day, month after month? The answer would seem to be, *way too many*. To quote Jane Velez-Mitchell one more time

*We spend more on fast food than on movies, books, magazines, newspapers, videos, and recorded music combined. Our increasingly overweight children often recognize fast food logos before they recognize their own names.*

A popular country song used to say "Mommas, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys..." Maybe they should change the words on that one! Again, our author writes "*American kids are being turned into junk food junkies. And, once hooked, they're likely to remain that way the rest of their lives.*" People get addicted to junk food because fast food in

particular over-stimulates the pleasure centers in our head. People want more of it. It makes them feel good, sort of.

I know that this is a lot to take in, but I have to hit one last area, and it might be very unpopular to bring up. It has to do with meat. First of all, we kill 10 billion animals every year for food. And that is just talking about here. In South America, rain forest areas are being destroyed every month in order to clear land for raising cattle or to grow grain to feed to cattle. We need forests. Forests eat carbon dioxide, and give us oxygen. We need that. And we cannot forget that all the animals we produce to eat release lots of methane gas into the air, and they create uncounted tons of waste that must go somewhere. We might ask ourselves first, *can we even sustain this kind of living*, and second, what if everyone else in the world did what we do?

This is Lent, the time when we struggle more than at any other time of the year with questions of how we are living. 200 years ago, Americans did not need to ask these questions. But as the world changes, so do the questions that must be asked. Are we eating that which is not bread? And what of those who are hungry? Of course we should care about people who have nothing. But we need to ask another question: *Is the way of life of our people doing harm to us, and to others around us?* Only we can control how we live. No one else will, or can. Will we live in a way that leaves room for others, that leaves food for others? Will we continue to feed upon that which is not bread? May God guide us to live as good stewards in this world. Amen.

