Sunday November 21, 1976

"HEALTH AND SALVATION" Luke 4:16-21
(The Importance of Diet)

"Clean up your plate! There are people starving in the world!" Most of us heard that command when we were children as we played with the stringbeans or spinach on our plates or tried to sneak the liver to the dog. Such reminders of starving people probably did little as far as convincing us to eat food we were sure we didn't like or if we were already filled.

The idea behind it all was to teach us not to be wasteful of food. And that continues to be a problem. The amount of food waste in this country is so vast that garbage disposal systems in many cities have difficulty handling the volume.

In a sermon on this subject last January, I pointed out that in studies done in the states of Oregon and Arizona, it was found that in one day the students in nine schools studied, wasted enough food during the noon meal to supply the total daily protein needs of 57 children for an entire year. Multiply that by the schools and cities across the country and the waste is astronomical.

In Tucson, the study found that the biggest food wasters were not the poor, but the middle and upper-middle income families. On the average, 10% of the food that was bought was wasted and in some neighborhoods the waste ran as high as 25%. Waste continues to be a problem.

But there is another way in which most of us need to clean up our plates and that is in the kind of food we eat as well as the size of the portions. We in this country probably eat more "junk foods" than any other nation on earth. Not only is this wasteful, but it is not good for our health.

It has been estimated that 28% of the average family's food budget is spent on snacks! Until recently, the consumption of sugar in this country was about 110 pounds per person per year. That amounts to 500 empty calories per person per day, or about 50 pounds of unneeded body fat for each of us per year!

Much of the food we eat and the quantity is not the best for us. Americans, for the most part, each a lot more food

than is needed. Health problems caused by over-weight are numerous and wide-spread. In fact we have more health problems caused by over-eating than we do by under-nourishment. And not only do most of us eat far too much sugar, but too much salt, too much white flour, and far too many processed foods from which most of the fiber and nutrients we need have been processed out.

In addition, we are now in the unique situation, in which we as consumers pay a lot more attention to the packaging than we do to what's inside the package. We buy processed and prepared foods all in the name of efficiency and speed.

Processing of food can range from simply brushing the dirt off raw potatoes to the complexity of taking potatoes apart and putting them back together again. Very little food is available anymore that has not been handled at least some by a processor. We rarely see much resemblance between the fresh food that comes off the farm and the foods that we buy packaged and processed in the stores. Some children are growing up thinking that chickens have six legs because that is how many come in a package.

I'm sure it's true that most of us would not want to take the time to prepare all of our foods from scratch, but just as clearly few of us are so lazy as to insist that a company make a margarine that can be squeezed ready-melted from a plastic bottle.

We complain a lot about high food costs, yet most of us could do a great deal to cut them down and improve our health at the same time. How? By buying fewer and fewer processed and prepared foods. Increasingly the cost of processing and packaging of foods is greater than the cost of the food in the package. This is even true of some fresh produce, where processing amounts to cleaning it off and boxing it. A 43¢ head of lettuce for example, pays 4¢ to the farmer and 6¢ to the processor. With fresh tomatoes, farmers get about 13¢ and the processors get a nickel. But when the processor puts the tomatoes in a can, the relationship is reversed--a 24¢ can of California tomatoes in 1972, contained 2¢ worth of tomatoes and 14¢ worth of processing.

A 71¢ box of wheaties contains about 2 or 3¢ worth of wheat; the box costs more than that. Someone suggested

that eaters could do as well nutritionally by chopping up the box and adding milk as they could do with the Wheaties. TOTAL, a cereal that is heavily advertised as being good and good for you is nothing more than Wheaties sprayed with a half a cent's worth of vitamins. The additional cost to us however, is about 26¢ per box. Pure, unprocessed wheat bran can be bought for 49¢ per pound and even cheaper in larger quantities and it has more food value and is better for us than any of the processed cereals.

Potatoes are another case in point. In 1960, the average American ate about 108 pounds of potatoes a year, 85 pounds of which were bought fresh. Now each one of us eats about the same number of pounds of potatoes each year, but a lot more of the pounds have been processed and packaged. They are either frozen, or fried, mashed or dehydrated, chipped or reconstituted and various kinds of preservatives are often added.

If fresh potatoes cost 10¢ per pound, the same potatoes in processed french fries cost us about 35¢ per pound. If you buy potatoes as instant mashed potatoes, you are paying about 71¢ per pound and as potatoe chips they cost you about 1.10 per ound and if you buy potatoes that have been processed in Chipsters, a snack food, the cost is about $1.72 per pound.

Then if you buy potatoes that have been made into Pringles, nearly 20% of the price one pays is for the hermetically sealed can they come in and the can is thrown away. In the same way the cost of packagin some TV dinners is greater than the cost of the food on the aluminum tray. Hamburger Helper costs more per pound than the best raw hamburger which it tries to help. At the same time, one could buy the same ingredients that are in hamburger helper for about one-third the price.

In addition to the money we can save by buying and eating fresh unprocessed foods, it's much better for our overall health. It has been estimated that the average person now consumes about 4 pounds of food additives per year. If we consumed that amount at once, they would kill us. A few years ago we ate only two pounds of additives per year.

In the past few months some of you have heard me refer to a book entitled, "How to live to be 100." It's a study of a group of people in southern Russia, who have amazing

health and longevity. The study concludes that one of the important factors contributing to the over-all health and long-living of these people is the kind of diet they have. The people eat lots of raw fruits and vegatables, almost no processed white sugar: honey is used for sweetening when necessary, no white flour, only whole grain flour, moderate portions of meat and not very much salt.

Most of us, if we would simply our eating habits, would improve our health and we would save money as well.

Now what's all this talk about food got to do with the Christian idea of salvation?

Salvation means among other things, being healthy in body, mind and spirit. It means being in harmony within ones-self so that our physical bodies are in good shape and function well, being in harmony and good relationship with those around us, with the total environment and with God. Our eternal life is not just something after death, but that which begins here and now.

When Jesus Christ began his public ministry by announcing God's salvation for all people, he described his ministry by reading from the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament--these words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has annointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and re-covering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

Jesus was saying that God's spirit was working through him because of what he, Jesus had been called to do. It is God's intention, he said, God's will that the poor receive good news, that those who are captive to disease, to bad habits, to such things as hate and envy find release from those habits, and those who are blind to God's working and God's will can be made to see and that all of us may know the liberation, the freedom that comes from being in right relation to God and to other human beings.

Salvation, the work of Jesus Christ and the church is the redemption of the whole person and that includes our phy-sical health. That's one of the reasons Jesus often healed persons of their diseases.

Our Christian faith underscores the fact that we are to take the best care possible of our physical bodies and we are not to abuse them. The body is the temple of the spirit and as such is holy.

It used to be said that the value of the human body was about 97¢ as far as the chemical make-up was concerned. That was before inflation. But recently a Yale professor of molecular biophysics and biochemistry, Harold Morowitz, sat down with a catalogue from a biochemical company and began to list the ingredients that are in the human body and their prices as listed in the catalogue.

He found that hemoglobin was $2.95 a gram, crystalline insulin was $47.50 a gram, and a slightly less common ingredient, acetate kinase, was listed at $8.86 a gram. But the real shocker was when he got to a gram of prolactin which was priced at $17,500,000 a gram--street price. He then figured out the dry weight of the human body in grams and drew up a shopping list. When he had finished, he discovered the value of the human body literally jumped at him, for it was $6,000,015.44. He was a six-million dollar man.

Professor Morowitz went on to note that these are just the inert ingredients of a human being. What is it worth to put the whole together and breathe life into such a mass of ingredients? He came to this conclusion: "We suddenly and sharply face the realization that each human being is priceless. We are led cent by dollar from a lowly pile of common material to a grand philosophical conclusion--the infinite preciousness of every person."

The Christian faith has always taught this. Salvation then, includes health, physical health and much more than that. It means soundness, wholeness, having it all together in mind, body and spirit.

The abundant life which Christ came to bestow, being born again, includes physical,mental and spiritual health. Christian churches are to be "health centers." God wants us to be healthy, wholesome, human beings who love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and who love our neighbors as ourselves. Do this, said Jesus, and you have already entered into God's Kingdom. You have begun eternal life here and now. That's what it means to be born again.

We are called then as Christians to work for a simplicity in our living. Simplicity is not a place, it is a direction. We will never arrive there; we will always be on our way.

Most of us can practice a lot more simplicity in our diets and we will be healthier for it. Furthermore it reduces waste and in the long run makes more food available for others. Try it, you'll like it. Amen.