Sunday, August 20, 1989
ON TASTING GOD
Psalm 34:8-10; I Corinthians 11:23-26

In a series of sermons this summer, I've been using different parts of the human body, as does the Bible, as metaphors for helping us understand how we are to live in this world as followers of Jesus.

There was a sermon about our hands. I noted that our hands and what we do with them are symbolic of how we approach life and its problems. Some people wring their hands in worry and do nothing more. Others quietly fold their hands, not in prayer, but in apathy. Still others jam their hands in their pockets and refuse to help anyone. Then there are the hand-droppers who begin to do something but never follow through. As followers of Jesus, however, we are to be "hands-on" people. We are those who join hands with others and with God, and then miracles happen.

A second sermon in the series was entitled, "What Makes You Blush?" Some of us seem not to know how to blush anymore. We are unshockable. We have lost our sensitivity.

A third sermon was about the human mouth and how we use the mouth for smiling, frowning, and talking. There is a lot of good we can do with our mouths and a lot of damage. We all have to learn when to keep silent and when to speak.

Then, two weeks ago, in a second set of sermons in this series, the subject was the "listening ear," and last Sunday, the "seeing eye." Next Sunday, I'm going to talk about feet.

You have no doubt noticed that in this series, I have also dealt already with three of our five senses — the sense of touch, hearing, and seeing. Today, I want to consider another one — our sense of taste. And maybe later, there will be a sermon on noses, our sense of smell, and how some people delight in putting their nose into other people's business where it does not always belong.

We use the word "taste" in many ways. First of all, we use the word in its original meaning. We say that some kinds of food taste good or that it does not taste good. But we also use taste in a broader sense, as a metaphor. We say that a person has good taste in clothes. Or someone else used good taste in decorating her home. Or we say, "That person showed poor taste in making a certain choice."

The Bible carries the metaphor even further in the Psalms when the Psalmist writes, "O taste and see that the Lord is good." (Psalm 34:8)

So this morning, as we prepare again to take Holy Communion, we are going to talk about ways in which we can "taste" God.

Our Hebrew ancestors in the Old Testament used the metaphor of "taste" in relationship to God in large part because their tradition carried in it a number of feast days. When they wanted to remember and celebrate God's goodness to them, it was a festive occasion and always involved food and drink as part of the celebration. So in a literal sense, the taste of good food and drink was associated closely with their faith in God's goodness. When they gathered as a community to recall God's mercy, they tasted God's goodness.

The highest festival was the Feast of the Passover when our Jewish forefathers and mothers remembered God's bringing them out of slavery in Egypt to their own promised land. They gathered each year to eat the unleavened bread; they literally were "tasting" God's goodness.

We know that after the resurrection of Jesus, the early Christians gathered every Sunday, the first day of the week, to remember Jesus, and that part of their celebration included eating together. They too were tasting God's goodness.

Do we not taste God in similar ways in our own time, no matter what our heritage? As families, we gather for festive meals on such holidays as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, weddings, birthdays, and in our love and caring for one another. As we eat together, we taste the goodness of God.

Thus, it is no accident that in the New Testament series, Jesus most frequently compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a huge banquet where we will all be gathered to taste the goodness of God.

I think it was also with this intention that Jesus chose to have a farewell meal with his closest disciples on the night before his crucifixion.

During the course of this Last Supper, Jesus took the food and drink which were commonly found on Palestinian tables and together he and his disciples tasted God's goodness.

And so it has been ever since then. The people of God, remembering Jesus, have gathered regularly to taste God's goodness. Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me."

The fact that in the Communion Service, we actually taste a small bite of bread and a bit of grape juice or wine, reminds us in a concrete way that the source of our strength is in God. The bread and wine are the free gift of God for the nourishment of our whole selves.

"O taste and see that the Lord is good." This eating together in Communion carries the message that God is with us and that we are to be with each other. Jesus put it this way, "I am the bread of life; those that come to me shall never hunger, and those who believe in me shall never thirst."

Leslie Weatherhead tells of a friend who attended a Roman Catholic Mass, during which in the sermon the priest argued for the literal presence of Christ's body in the consecrated wafer on the altar, and the blood of Christ in the wine, or what is technically called the doctrine of transubstantiation.

After the Mass, he met one of the worshippers and asked her if she believed all that the priest had said. The old woman answered this way: "When I come to Mass, sir, I cannot follow what they do up at the altar. I simply kneel down and think about Jesus. I think of that last week with his friends and the Last Supper; how he knelt in agony in Gethsemane; how they arrested him and all night tortured him and how he died, and how his disciples afterward gathered again and again around the Lord's table and in the breaking of bread knew that God gave them strength and that Jesus was with them. I get very near to Jesus then, sir, and when I go home, I feel that he comes with me. That is all. That is enough." Amen.