**Taste and See**

**FBC Albemarle**

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Over the last few weeks, we have been talking about living the type of life that is true to ourselves and true to who God has created us to be. On Graduation Sunday, we began with a better understanding of what it meant to flourish by being the best version of ourselves God created even before we were born. Next, we talked about God’s desire for us to flourish so that we could experience life to the full today and in the future. The following Sunday, Jacob shared with us about the river of life that is flowing through the Holy Spirit. Two weeks ago, we discovered that when it comes to growing closer to God, there wasn’t a “one size fits all” approach. Finally, last week, we talked about how we needed to surrender all in order for God to take full control of our lives. Today, we want to discover how our God-given desires can be used to draw us closer to him and to be used for the kingdom.

I don’t know about you, but I love to travel. I love to see new places and experience new cultures. I also love tasting new foods! Different places around the globe feature all different types of cuisine. Some of it seem natural and others, not so much. Each region has its exotic foods that sound gross, but many natives find it ordinary and appetizing.

When Amy and I traveled to Scotland two years ago, we had to try haggis. Haggis is a dark, savory pudding containing sheep’s heart, liver and lung, minced with onion, oatmeal, spices and salt; all mixed with stock and the encased in the sheep’s stomach lining. To the Scots, it is a delicacy. To most everyone else in the world, just the description of it is enough to make you throw up.

When I was in Kenya far in the bush, the staple food for the villagers was ugali. Ugali is a dish made of corn flour (cornmeal) cooked in either boiling water or milk to a stiff or dough-like consistency. It is their main starch, much like potatoes are here in the south or rice in Asia or Latin America. It is pretty tasteless but filling.

When the mission team went to Peru last summer, two of the local delicacies were alpaca and guinea pig so we had to make sure everyone had an opportunity to get a taste! Many in our group tried one or both of these exotic foods. Alpaca tastes like venison and guinea pig tastes like chicken!

John Glendinning, a Barnard University biology professor who studies taste, believes that people who travel and try different foods do so because of the setting. When you are in a new place, you are more willing to try new foods because of the context. Exotic foods taste better when you are traveling because you are working hard to experience the culture. You are also more willing to try different foods, food you would never try at home, because of the people around you. You want to fit in and not stand out…sometimes difficult for a bald-headed Asian in the bush of Kenya!

So, what does all of this have to do with Psalm 34? This psalm was written as an acrostic with the Hebrew alphabet. Obviously, when it is translated into English, we lose the artistic feature of the poem, but the meaning remains the same. The psalm begins with bold language of thanksgiving and praise to God. YHWH has brought hope to David because of God’s goodness and faithfulness. Then in verses 4-8, David narrates why he is full of thanksgiving. When he sought the Lord, he was faithful. God “answered,” “delivered,” “heard,” and “saved.”

Most theologians believe this poem was written as a way to express David’s thankfulness after his escape from Gath in 1 Samuel 21. David had just escaped Saul’s attempt to kill him, thanks to the help of Saul’s own son, Jonathan. He first went to Nob where Ahimelech, the priest, fed David and his men consecrated bread because there was nothing else to eat. Afterwards, David fled from Saul to Gath where he was confronted by its king, Achish. David was afraid of Achish so he pretended to be insane in his presence. He started to act like a madman, crazily making marks on the doors of the gate and foaming at the mouth. Seeing the madness, King Achish sent David away so that he didn’t have to deal with him.

Then in verse 8, David writes, “Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.” The Message translation says, “Open your mouth and taste, open your eyes and see – how good God is. Blessed are you who run to him.” Like trying new foods when you are in a different culture, David says to taste the goodness and faithfulness of God and see for yourself how good God is. Open your mouth and taste the goodness of God. Open your eyes and see the faithfulness of our Lord. Then, run to him! Take refuge in his arms! God is good all the time. All the time, God is good!

God is not just good in times of trouble. He is always good, and God wants for you to pursue the desires he has instilled in you. Most of the time, we refer to the desires in our lives as fleshly wants that are found in the world. We think, “If it isn’t spiritual, then it must be sinful.” But what if we change the way we think about our desires? What if we think about our desires as God’s invitation to taste all that is good and see all God desires to do in and through us?

In Genesis, we learn that Jacob fell in love with Rachel so deeply that he agreed to work for seven years to pay her dowry. Scripture says, “So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.” (Gen. 29:20) Who would regard seven years of work as a couple of days? The one who is working for his dream to marry the one he loves. We, of course, know this story. Laban tricked Jacob by first giving Leah, the older sister, as his first wife. Jacob had to work another seven years to earn the right to marry Rachel, the one he loved. That is a God-given desire that is good!

God is a desire-creating, desire-satisfying God. God created the desires of our hearts and God delights to fulfill those desires. I realize that my desires are distorted by sin and need to be cleansed, purified, and retrained. This is what Jesus refers to when he says, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” We must say no to any desires that would keep us from living in the Spirit. We must always be ready to sacrifice a lesser desire for the sake of living a greater life.

Yet, God’s plan is that every time we experience an authentic desire, one that is implanted by God in our hearts, we would come to a deeper understanding of who God is and how good He is. We learn how God has wired us and what he wants us to do. As a result, we find ourselves loving this great God more and more. More we taste, more we are filled. More we see, faster we run to him.

What types of desires am I talking about? I’m talking about everyday desires like material things and money. I’m talking about your desires to achieve, your desires for deeper relationships, and even your physical desires. Money and material things have great value in God’s kingdom. Desiring to achieve greatness at work or at a skill are passions God has placed in you. Wanting close friends or a mate are desires God has placed in your hearts. Desiring to make music, singing, dancing and celebrating are all things that can draw us closer to God. Sure, all of these desires can become fleshly desires and lead us away from God and his kingdom when not put in proper perspective. However, when our hearts are in the right place and we seek God more than ourselves, than the desires God places in you are ways to experience the goodness of God.

When we are in a right relationship with God and the Spirit is flowing through us, our money and material things are used to show generosity toward others. We want to do our best and achieve greatness not for our own sake but to have a larger platform to show the world God’s goodness. We pursue deeper relationship with people around us in order to experience the love of God through the love of others. We sing, dance and throw parties because life with Christ is a party.

So, how do we focus our God-given desires toward God and his kingdom without falling into the pitfalls of selfishness and greed? It begins with always being aware of God’s goodness. Take a moment at the beginning of each day to invite God to be with you. Consciously thank God as you go through the day to remember the source of the blessings.

Next, live in community with thanksgiving. Meet with others who share your joys. Be in community with people who are thankful for your God-given desires. Let others inspire you to live life to the fullest as God has designed for us to do.

Finally, learn to keep life in perspective. Make sure your heart is aligned with God’s. Allow your desires to be used by God to build up God’s kingdom. Allow your passion to strengthen others around you and empower those who need a helping hand. Always be reminded that life is about others and not just yourself.

So, do as the psalmist said. Run to Jesus. Jump in his arms and rest in God’s goodness. It is an open invitation for you to open your mouth and taste all that is good in Him. You are invited to open your eyes and see how good God is. Blessed are you who run to him! What are you waiting for?